



BEN HUR

LEW WALLACE



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BEN-HUR



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A TALE OF THE CHRIST

BY

LEW. WALLACE

AUTHOR OF "THE BOYHOOD OF CHRIST"
"THE FAIR GOD" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED FROM DRAWINGS BY
WILLIAM MARTIN JOHNSON
AND PHOTOGRAPHS

VOL. II.

NEW YORK AND LONDON
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS

1903

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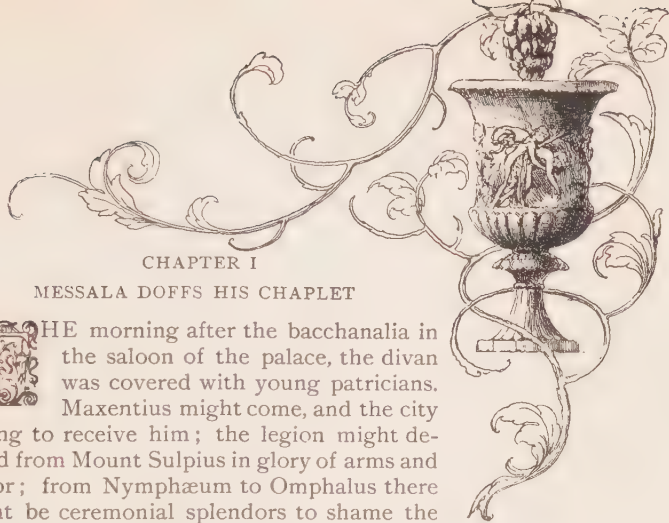
BOOK FIFTH

*"Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet and blossom in the dust."*

SHIRLEY.

*"And, through the heat of conflict, keeps the law,
In calmness made, and sees what he foresaw."*

WORDSWORTH.



CHAPTER I

MESSALA DOFFS HIS CHAPLET

THE morning after the bacchanalia in the saloon of the palace, the divan was covered with young patricians. Maxentius might come, and the city throng to receive him; the legion might descend from Mount Sulpium in glory of arms and armor; from Nymphæum to Omphalus there might be ceremonial splendors to shame the most notable ever before seen or heard of in the gorgeous East; yet would the many continue to sleep ignominiously on the divan where they had fallen or been carelessly tumbled by the indifferent slaves; that they would be able to take part in the reception that day was about as possible as for the lay-figures in the studio of a modern artist to rise and go bonneted and plumed through the one, two, three of a waltz.

Not all, however, who participated in the orgy were in the shameful condition. When dawn began to peer through the skylights of the saloon, Messala arose, and took the chaplet from his head, in sign that the revel was at an end; then he gathered his robe about him, gave a last look at the scene, and, without a word, departed for his quarters. Cicero could not have retired with more gravity from a night-long senatorial debate.

Three hours afterwards two couriers entered

his room, and from his own hand received each a despatch, sealed and in duplicate, and consisting chiefly of a letter to Valerius Gratus, the procurator, still resident in Cæsarea. The importance attached to the speedy and certain delivery of the paper may be inferred. One courier was to proceed overland, the other by sea; both were to make the utmost haste.

It is of great concern now that the reader should be fully informed of the contents of the letter thus forwarded, and it is accordingly given :

“ANTIOCH. XII. Kal. Jul.

“*Messala to Gratus.*

“O my Midas!

“I pray thou take no offence at the address, seeing it is one of love and gratitude, and an admission that thou art most fortunate among men; seeing, also, that thy ears are as they were derived from thy mother, only proportionate to thy matured condition.

“O my Midas!

“I have to relate to thee an astonishing event, which, though as yet somewhat in the field of conjecture, will, I doubt not, justify thy instant consideration.

“Allow me first to revive thy recollection. Remember, a good many years ago, a family of a prince of Jerusalem, incredibly ancient and vastly rich—by name Ben-Hur. If thy memory have a limp or ailment of any kind, there is, if I mistake not, a wound on thy head which may help thee to a revival of the circumstance.

“Next, to arouse thy interest. In punishment of the attempt upon thy life—for dear repose of conscience, may all the gods forbid it should ever prove to have been an accident!—the family were seized and summarily disposed of, and their property con-



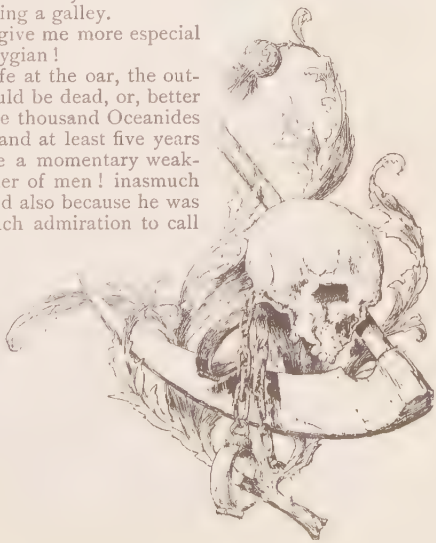
fiscated. And inasmuch, O my Midas! as the action had the approval of our Cæsar, who was as just as he was wise—be there flowers upon his altar forever!—there should be no shame in referring to the sums which were realized to us respectively from that source, for which it is not possible I can ever cease to be grateful to thee, certainly not while I continue, as at present, in the uninterrupted enjoyment of the part which fell to me.

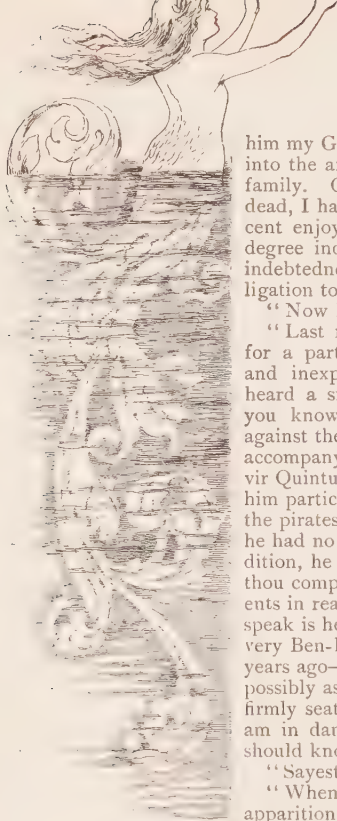
“In vindication of thy wisdom—a quality for which, as I am now advised, the son of Gordius, to whom I have boldly likened thee, was never distinguished among men or gods—I recall further that thou didst make disposition of the family of Hur, both of us at the time supposing the plan hit upon to be the most effective possible for the purposes in view, which were silence and delivery over to inevitable but natural death. Thou wilt remember what thou didst with the mother and sister of the malefactor; yet, if now I yield to a desire to learn whether they be living or dead, I know, from knowing the amiability of thy nature, O my Gratus, that thou wilt pardon me as one scarcely less amiable than thyself.

“As more immediately essential to the present business, however, I take the liberty of inviting to thy remembrance that the actual criminal was sent to the galleys a slave for life—so the precept ran; and it may serve to make the event which I am about to relate the more astonishing by saying here that I saw and read the receipt for his body delivered in course to the tribune commanding a galley.

“Thou mayst begin now to give me more especial heed, O my most excellent Phrygian!

“Referring to the limit of life at the oar, the outlaw thus justly disposed of should be dead, or, better speaking, some one of the three thousand Oceanides should have taken him to husband at least five years ago. And if thou wilt excuse a momentary weakness, O most virtuous and tender of men! inasmuch as I loved him in childhood, and also because he was very handsome—I used in much admiration to call





him my Ganymede—he ought in right to have fallen into the arms of the most beautiful daughter of the family. Of opinion, however, that he was certainly dead, I have lived quite five years in calm and innocent enjoyment of the fortune for which I am in a degree indebted to him. I make the admission of indebtedness without intending it to diminish my obligation to thee.

“Now I am at the very point of interest.

“Last night, while acting as master of the feast for a party just from Rome—their extreme youth and inexperience appealed to my compassion—I heard a singular story. Maxentius, the consul, as you know, comes to-day to conduct a campaign against the Parthians. Of the ambitious who are to accompany him there is one, a son of the late duumvir Quintus Arrius. I had occasion to inquire about him particularly. When Arrius set out in pursuit of the pirates, whose defeat gained him his final honors, he had no family; when he returned from the expedition, he brought back with him an heir. Now be thou composed as becomes the owner of so many talents in ready sestertii! The son and heir of whom I speak is he whom thou didst send to the galleys—the very Ben-Hur who should have died at his oar five years ago—returned now with fortune and rank, and possibly as a Roman citizen, to— Well, thou art too firmly seated to be alarmed, but I, O my Midas! I am in danger—no need to tell thee of what. Who should know, if thou dost not?

“Sayest thou to all this, tut-tut?

“When Arrius, the father, by adoption, of this apparition from the arms of the most beautiful of the Oceanides (see above my opinion of what she should be), joined battle with the pirates, his vessel was sunk, and but two of all her crew escaped drowning—Arrius himself and this one, his heir.

“The officers who took them from the plank on which they were floating say the associate of the fortunate tribune was a young man who, when lifted to the deck, was in the dress of a galley slave.

“This should be convincing, to say least; but lest

thou say tut-tut again, I tell thee, O my Midas! that yesterday, by good chance—I have a vow to Fortune in consequence—I met the mysterious son of Arrius face to face; and I declare now that, though I did not then recognize him, he is the very Ben-Hur who was for years my playmate; the very Ben-Hur who, if he be a man, though of the commonest grade must this very moment of my writing be thinking of vengeance—for so would I were I he—vengeance not to be satisfied short of life; vengeance for country, mother, sister, self, and—I say it last, though thou mayst think it would be first—for fortune lost.

“By this time, O good my benefactor and friend! my Gratus! in consideration of thy sestertii in peril, their loss being the worst which could befall one of thy high estate—I quit calling thee after the foolish old King of Phrygia—by this time, I say (meaning after having read me so far), I have faith to believe thou hast ceased saying tut-tut, and art ready to think what ought to be done in such emergency.

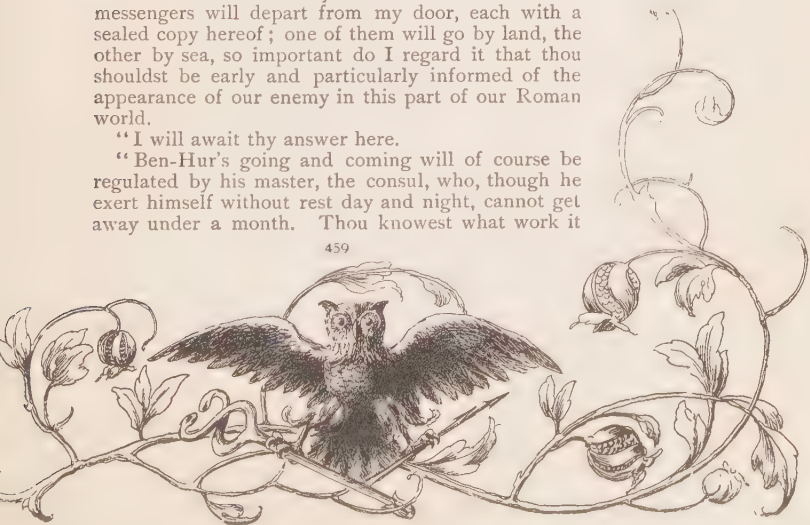
“It were vulgar to ask thee now what shall be done. Rather let me say I am thy client; or, better yet, thou art my Ulysses whose part it is to give me sound direction.

“And I please myself thinking I see thee when this letter is put into thy hand. I see thee read it once, thy countenance all gravity, and then again with a smile; then, hesitation ended, and thy judgment formed, it is this, or it is that; wisdom like Mercury’s, promptitude like Cæsar’s.

“The sun is now fairly risen. An hour hence two messengers will depart from my door, each with a sealed copy hereof; one of them will go by land, the other by sea, so important do I regard it that thou shouldst be early and particularly informed of the appearance of our enemy in this part of our Roman world.

“I will await thy answer here.

“Ben-Hur’s going and coming will of course be regulated by his master, the consul, who, though he exert himself without rest day and night, cannot get away under a month. Thou knowest what work it





is to assemble and provide for an army destined to operate in a desolate, townless country.

"I saw the Jew yesterday in the Grove of Daphne; and if he be not there now, he is certainly in the neighborhood, making it easy for me to keep him in eye. Indeed, wert thou to ask me where he is now, I should say, with the most positive assurance, he is to be found at the old Orchard of Palms, under the tent of the traitor Sheik Ilderim, who cannot long escape our strong hand. Be not surprised if Maxentius, as his first measure, places the Arab on the ship for forwarding to Rome.

"I am so particular about the whereabouts of the Jew because it will be important to thee, O illustrious! when thou comest to consider what is to be done; for already I know, and by the knowledge I flatter myself I am growing in wisdom, that in every scheme involving human action there are three elements always to be taken in account—time, place, and agency.

"If thou sayest this is the place, have thou then no hesitancy in trusting the business to thy most loving friend, who would be thy aptest scholar as well.

"MESSALA."

CHAPTER II

ILDERIM'S ARABS UNDER THE YOKE

BOUT the time the couriers departed from Messala's door with the despatches (it being yet the early morning hour), Ben-Hur entered Ilderim's tent. He had taken a plunge into the lake, and breakfasted, and appeared now in an under-tunic, sleeveless, and with skirt scarcely reaching to the knee.

The sheik saluted him from the divan.

"I give thee peace, son of Arrius," he said,

with admiration, for, in truth, he had never seen a more perfect illustration of glowing, powerful, confident manhood. "I give thee peace and good-will. The horses are ready, I am ready. And thou?"

"The peace thou givest me, good sheik, I give thee in return. I thank thee for so much good-will. I am ready."

Ilderim clapped his hands.

"I will have the horses brought. Be seated."

"Are they yoked?"

"No."

"Then suffer me to serve myself," said Ben-Hur. "It is needful that I make the acquaintance of thy Arabs. I must know them by name, O sheik, that I may speak to them singly: nor less must I know their temper, for they are like men; if bold, the better of scolding; if timid, the better of praise and flattery. Let the servants bring me the harness."

"And the chariot?" asked the sheik.

"I will let the chariot alone to-day. In its place, let them bring me a fifth horse, if thou hast it; he should be barebacked, and fleet as the others."

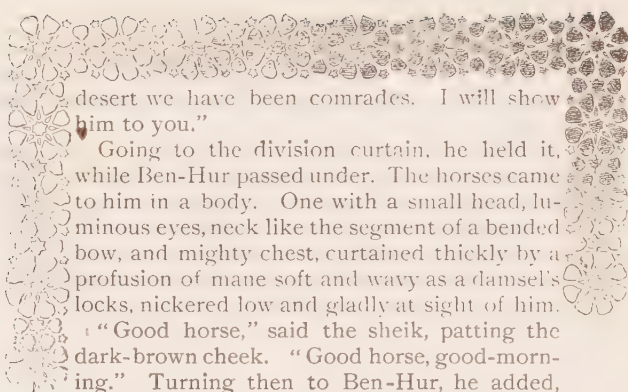
Ilderim's wonder was aroused, and he summoned a servant immediately.

"Bid them bring the harness for the four," he said—"the harness for the four, and the bridle for Sirius."

Ilderim then arose.

"Sirius is my love, and I am his, O son of Arrius. We have been comrades for twenty years—in tent, in battle, in all stages of the





desert we have been comrades. I will show him to you."

Going to the division curtain, he held it, while Ben-Hur passed under. The horses came to him in a body. One with a small head, luminous eyes, neck like the segment of a bended bow, and mighty chest, curtained thickly by a profusion of mane soft and wavy as a damsel's locks, nickered low and gladly at sight of him.

"Good horse," said the sheik, patting the dark-brown cheek. "Good horse, good-morning." Turning then to Ben-Hur, he added, "This is Sirius, father of the four here. Mira, the mother, awaits our return, being too precious to be hazarded in a region where there is a stronger hand than mine. And much I doubt," he laughed as he spoke—"much I doubt, O son of Arrius, if the tribe could endure her absence. She is their glory; they worship her; did she gallop over them, they would laugh. Ten thousand horsemen, sons of the desert, will ask to-day, 'Have you heard of Mira?' And to the answer, 'She is well,' they will say, 'God is good! blessed be God!'"

"Mira—Sirius—names of stars, are they not, O sheik?" asked Ben-Hur, going to each of the four, and to the sire, offering his hand.

"And why not?" replied Ilderim. "Wert thou ever abroad on the desert at night?"

"No."

"Then thou canst not know how much we Arabs depend upon the stars. We borrow their names in gratitude, and give them in love. My fathers all had their Miras, as I have mine.

and these children are stars no less. There, see thou, is Rigel, and there Antares; that one is Atair, and he whom thou goest to now is Aldebaran, the youngest of the brood, but none the worse of that—no, not he! Against the wind he will carry thee till it roar in thy ears like Akaba; and he will go where thou sayest, son of Arrius—aye, by the glory of Solomon! he will take thee to the lion's jaws, if thou darest so much."

The harness was brought. With his own hands Ben-Hur equipped the horses; with his own hands he led them out of the tent, and there attached the reins.

"Bring me Sirius," he said.

An Arab could not have better sprung to seat on the courser's back.

"And now the reins."

They were given him, and carefully separated.

"Good sheik," he said, "I am ready. Let a guide go before me to the field, and send some of thy men with water."

There was no trouble at starting. The horses were not afraid. Already there seemed a tacit understanding between them and the new driver, who had performed his part calmly, and with the confidence which always begets confidence. The order of going was precisely that of driving, except that Ben-Hur sat upon Sirius instead of standing in the chariot. Ilderim's spirit arose. He combed his beard, and smiled with satisfaction as he muttered, "He is not a Roman, no, by the splendor of God!" He followed on foot, the entire tenantry of the



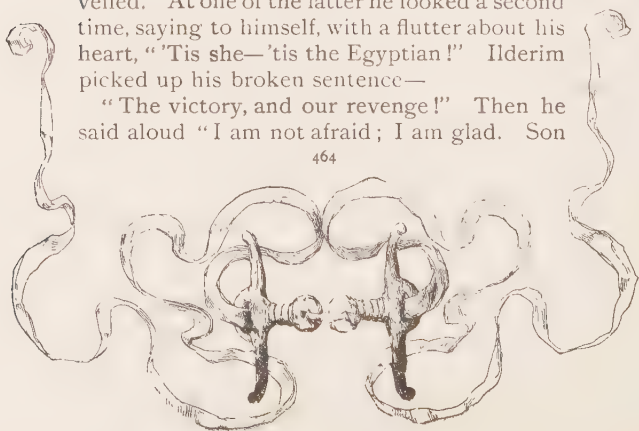
dowar—men, women, and children—pouring after him, participants all in his solicitude, if not in his confidence.

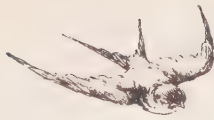
The field, when reached, proved ample and well fitted for the training, which Ben-Hur began immediately by driving the four at first slowly, and in perpendicular lines, and then in wide circles. Advancing a step in the course, he put them next into a trot; again progressing, he pushed into a gallop; at length he contracted the circles, and yet later drove eccentrically here and there, right, left, forward, and without a break. An hour was thus occupied. Slowing the gait to a walk, he drove up to Ilderim.

"The work is done, nothing now but practice," he said. "I give you joy, Sheik Ilderim, that you have such servants as these. See," he continued, dismounting and going to the horses, "see, the gloss of their red coats is without spot; they breathe lightly as when I began. I give thee great joy, and it will go hard if"—he turned his flashing eyes upon the old man's face—"if we have not the victory and our—"

He stopped, colored, bowed. At the sheik's side he observed, for the first time, Balthasar, leaning upon his staff, and two women closely veiled. At one of the latter he looked a second time, saying to himself, with a flutter about his heart, "'Tis she—'tis the Egyptian!" Ilderim picked up his broken sentence—

"The victory, and our revenge!" Then he said aloud "I am not afraid; I am glad. Son





of Arrius, thou art the man. Be the end like the beginning, and thou shalt see of what stuff is the lining of the hand of an Arab who is able to give."

"I thank thee, good sheik," Ben-Hur returned, modestly. "Let the servants bring drink for the horses."

With his own hands he gave the water.

Remounting Sirius, he renewed the training, going as before from walk to trot, from trot to gallop; finally, he pushed the steady racers into the run, gradually quickening it to full speed. The performance then became exciting; and there were applause for the dainty handling of the reins, and admiration for the four, which were the same, whether they flew forward or wheeled in varying curvature. In their action there were unity, power, grace, pleasure, all without effort or sign of labor. The admiration was unmixed with pity or reproach, which would have been as well bestowed upon swallows in their evening flight.



In the midst of the exercises, and the attention they received from all the by-standers, Malluch came upon the ground, seeking the sheik.

"I have a message for you, O sheik," he said, availing himself of a moment he supposed favorable for the speech—"a message from Simonides, the merchant."

"Simonides!" ejaculated the Arab. "Ah! tis well. May Abaddon take all his enemies!"

"He bade me give thee first the holy peace of God," Malluch continued; "and then this



despatch, with prayer that thou read it the instant of receipt."

Ilderim, standing in his place, broke the sealing of the package delivered to him, and from a wrapping of fine linen took two letters, which he proceeded to read.

[No. 1.]

"Simonides to Sheik Ilderim.

"O friend!

"Assure thyself first of a place in my inner heart.

"Then—

"There is in thy dowar a youth of fair presence, calling himself the son of Arrius; and such he is by adoption.

"He is very dear to me.

"He hath a wonderful history, which I will tell thee; come thou to-day or to-morrow, that I may tell thee the history, and have thy counsel.

"Meantime, favor all his requests, so they be not against honor. Should there be need of reparation, I am bound to thee for it.

"That I have interest in this youth, keep thou private.

"Remember me to thy other guest. He, his daughter, thyself, and all whom thou mayst choose to be of thy company, must depend upon me at the Circus the day of the games. I have seats already engaged.

"To thee and all thine, peace.

"What should I be, O my friend, but thy friend?

"SIMONIDES."

[No. 2.]

"Simonides to Sheik Ilderim.

"O friend!

"Out of the abundance of my experience, I send you a word.

"There is a sign which all persons not Romans,

and who have moneys or goods subject to despoilment, accept as warning—that is, the arrival at a seat of power of some high Roman official charged with authority.

“To-day comes the Consul Maxentius.

“Be thou warned!

“Another word of advice.

“A conspiracy, to be of effect against thee, O friend, must include the Herods as parties; thou hast great properties in their dominions.

“Wherefore keep thou watch.

“Send this morning to thy trusty keepers of the roads leading south from Antioch, and bid them search every courier going and coming; if they find private despatches relating to thee or thine affairs, thou shouldst see them.

“You should have received this yesterday, though it is not too late, if you act promptly.

“If couriers left Antioch this morning, your messengers know the by-ways, and can get before them with your orders.

“Do not hesitate.

“Burn this after reading.

“O my friend! thy friend,

SIMONIDES.”

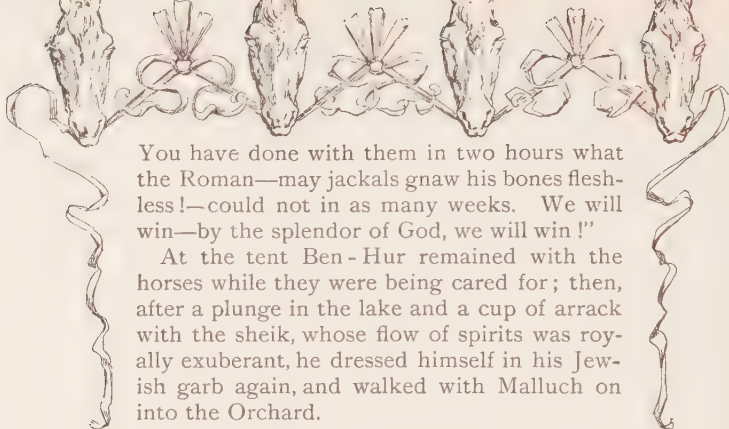
Ilderim read the letters a second time, and refolded them in the linen wrap, and put the package under his girdle.

The exercises in the field continued but a little longer—in all about two hours. At their conclusion, Ben-Hur brought the four to a walk, and drove to Ilderim.

“With leave, O sheik,” he said, “I will return thy Arabs to the tent, and bring them out again this afternoon.”

Ilderim walked to him as he sat on Sirius, and said, “I give them to you, son of Arrius, to do with as you will until after the games.





You have done with them in two hours what the Roman—may jackals gnaw his bones fleshless!—could not in as many weeks. We will win—by the splendor of God, we will win!”

At the tent Ben-Hur remained with the horses while they were being cared for; then, after a plunge in the lake and a cup of arrack with the sheik, whose flow of spirits was royally exuberant, he dressed himself in his Jewish garb again, and walked with Malluch on into the Orchard.

There was much conversation between the two, not all of it important. One part, however, must not be overlooked. Ben-Hur was speaking.

“I will give you,” he said, “an order for my property stored in the khan this side the river by the Seleucian Bridge. Bring it to me to-day, if you can. And, good Malluch—if I do not overtask you—”

Malluch protested heartily his willingness to be of service.

“Thank you, Malluch, thank you,” said Ben-Hur. “I will take you at your word, remembering that we are brethren of the old tribe, and that the enemy is a Roman. First, then—as you are a man of business, which I much fear Sheik Ilderim is not—”

“Arabs seldom are,” said Malluch, gravely.

“Nay, I do not impeach their shrewdness, Malluch. It is well, however, to look after them. To save all forfeit or hinderance in connection with the race, you would put me perfectly at rest by going to the office of the Cir-

cus, and seeing that he has complied with every preliminary rule ; and if you can get a copy of the rules, the service may be of great avail to me. I would like to know the colors I am to wear, and particularly the number of the crypt I am to occupy at the starting ; if it be next Messala's on the right or left, it is well ; if not, and you can have it changed so as to bring me next the Roman, do so. Have you good memory, Malluch ?”

“ It has failed me, but never, son of Arrius, where the heart helped it as now.”

“ I will venture, then, to charge you with one further service. I saw yesterday that Messala was proud of his chariot, as he might be, for the best of Cæsar's scarcely surpass it. Can you not make its display an excuse which will enable you to find if it be light or heavy ? I would like to have its exact weight and measurements—and, Malluch, though you fail in all else, bring me exactly the height his axle stands above the ground. You understand, Malluch ? I do not wish him to have any actual advantage of me. I do not care for his splendor ; if I beat him, it will make his fall the harder, and my triumph the more complete. If there are advantages really important, I want them.”

“ I see, I see !” said Malluch. “ A line dropped from the centre of the axle is what you want.”

“ Thou hast it ; and be glad, Malluch—it is the last of my commissions. Let us return to the dowar.”



At the door of the tent they found a servant replenishing the smoke-stained bottles of leben freshly made, and stopped to refresh themselves. Shortly afterwards Malluch returned to the city.

During their absence, a messenger well mounted had been despatched with orders as suggested by Simonides. He was an Arab, and carried nothing written.

CHAPTER III THE ARTS OF CLEOPATRA

HIRAS, the daughter of Balthasar, sends me with salutation and a message," said a servant to Ben-Hur, who was taking his ease in the tent.

"Give me the message."

"Would it please you to accompany her upon the lake?"

"I will carry the answer myself. Tell her so."

His shoes were brought him, and in a few minutes Ben-Hur sallied out to find the fair Egyptian. The shadow of the mountains was creeping over the Orchard of Palms in advance of night. Afar through the trees came the tinkling of sheep-bells, the lowing of cattle, and the voices of the herdsmen bringing their charges home. Life at the Orchard, it should be remembered, was in all respects as pastoral as life on the scantier meadows of the desert.

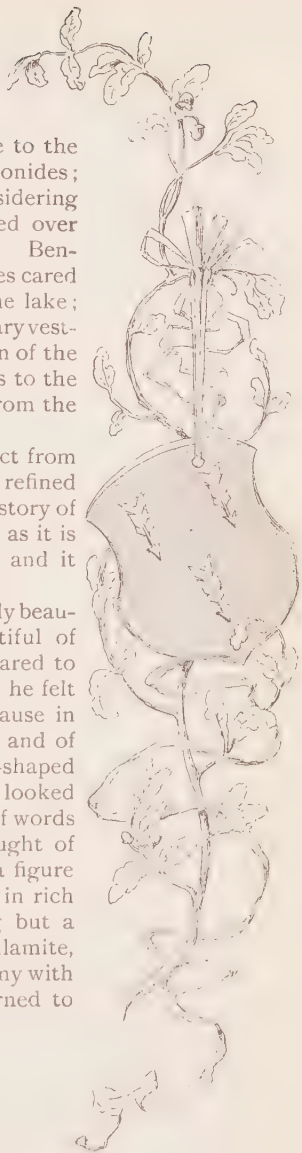
Sheik Ilderim had witnessed the exercises of the afternoon, being a repetition of those of



the morning; after which he had gone to the city in answer to the invitation of Simonides; he might return in the night; but, considering the immensity of the field to be talked over with his friend, it was hardly possible. Ben-Hur, thus left alone, had seen his horses cared for; cooled and purified himself in the lake; exchanged the field garb for his customary vestments, all white, as became a Sadducean of the pure blood; supped early; and, thanks to the strength of youth, was well recovered from the violent exertion he had undergone.

It is neither wise nor honest to detract from beauty as a quality. There cannot be a refined soul insensible to its influence. The story of Pygmalion and his statue is as natural as it is poetical. Beauty is of itself a power; and it was now drawing Ben-Hur.

The Egyptian was to him a wonderfully beautiful woman—beautiful of face, beautiful of form. In his thought she always appeared to him as he saw her at the fountain; and he felt the influence of her voice, sweeter because in tearful expression of gratitude to him, and of her eyes—the large, soft, black, almond-shaped eyes declarative of her race—eyes which looked more than lies in the supremest wealth of words to utter; and recurrences of the thought of her were returns just so frequent of a figure tall, slender, graceful, refined, wrapped in rich and floating drapery, wanting nothing but a fitting mind to make her, like the Shulamite, and in the same sense, terrible as an army with banners. In other words, as she returned to



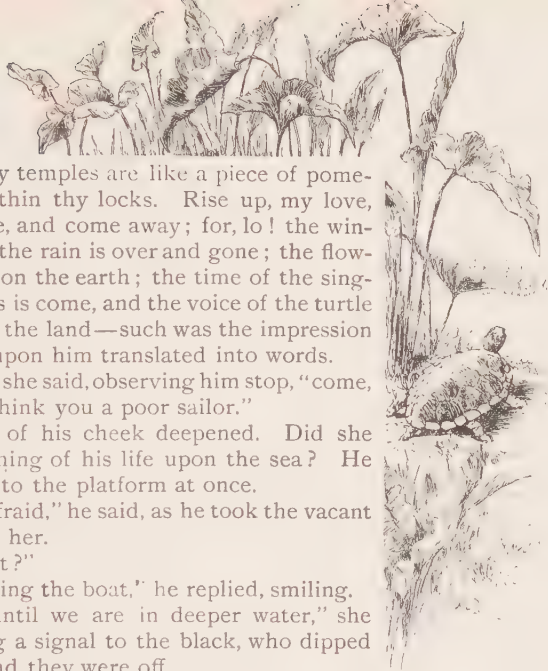
his fancy, the whole passionate Song of Solomon came with her, inspired by her presence. With this sentiment and that feeling, he was going to see if she actually justified them. It was not love that was taking him, but admiration and curiosity, which might be the heralds of love.

The landing was a simple affair, consisting of a short stair-way, and a platform garnished by some lamp-posts; yet at the top of the steps he paused, arrested by what he beheld.

There was a shallop resting upon the clear water lightly as an egg-shell. An Ethiop—the camel-driver at the Castalian fount—occupied the rower's place, his blackness intensified by a livery of shining white. All the boat aft was cushioned and carpeted with stuffs brilliant with Tyrian red. On the rudder seat sat the Egyptian herself, sunk in Indian shawls and a very vapor of most delicate veils and scarfs. Her arms were bare to the shoulders; and, not merely faultless in shape, they had the effect of compelling attention to them—their pose, their action, their expression; the hands, the fingers even, seemed endowed with graces and meaning; each was an object of beauty. The shoulders and neck were protected from the evening air by an ample scarf, which yet did not hide them.

In the glance he gave her, Ben-Hur paid no attention to these details. There was simply an impression made upon him; and, like strong light, it was a sensation, not a thing of sight or enumeration. Thy lips are like a thread of





scarlet; thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate within thy locks. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away; for, lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land—such was the impression she made upon him translated into words.

"Come," she said, observing him stop, "come, or I shall think you a poor sailor."

The red of his cheek deepened. Did she know anything of his life upon the sea? He descended to the platform at once.

"I was afraid," he said, as he took the vacant seat before her.

"Of what?"

"Of sinking the boat," he replied, smiling.

"Wait until we are in deeper water," she said, giving a signal to the black, who dipped the oars, and they were off.

If love and Ben-Hur were enemies, the latter was never more at mercy. The Egyptian sat where he could not but see her; she, whom he had already engrossed in memory as his ideal of the Shulamite. With her eyes giving light to his, the stars might come out, and he not see them; and so they did. The night might fall with unrelieved darkness everywhere else; her look would make illumination for him. And then, as everybody knows, given youth and such companionship, there is no situation in which the fancy takes such complete control as upon tranquil waters under a calm night sky, warm with summer. It is so easy at such time to glide



imperceptibly out of the commonplace into the ideal.

"Give me the rudder," he said.

"No," she replied, "that were to reverse the relation. Did I not ask you to ride with me? I am indebted to you, and would begin payment. You may talk and I will listen, or I will talk and you will listen: that choice is yours; but it shall be mine to choose where we go, and the way thither."

"And where may that be?"

"You are alarmed again."

"O fair Egyptian, I but asked you the first question of every captive."

"Call me Egypt."

"I would rather call you Iras."

"You may think of me by that name, but call me Egypt."

"Egypt is a country, and means many people."

"Yes, yes! And such a country!"

"I see; it is to Egypt we are going."

"Would we were! I would be so glad."

She sighed as she spoke.

"You have no care for me, then," he said.

"Ah, by that I know you were never there."

"I never was."

"Oh, it is the land where there are no unhappy people, the desired of all the rest of the earth, the mother of all the gods, and therefore supremely blest. There, O son of Arrius, there the happy find increase of happiness, and the wretched, going, drink once of the sweet water of the sacred river, and laugh and sing, rejoicing like children."



ACELDAMA, THE FIELD OF BLOOD

Are not the very poor with you there as elsewhere?"

"The very poor in Egypt are the very simple in wants and ways," she replied. "They have no wish beyond enough, and how little that is a Greek or a Roman cannot know."

"But I am neither Greek nor Roman."

She laughed.

"I have a garden of roses, and in the midst of it is a tree, and its bloom is the richest of all. Whence came it, think you?"

"From Persia, the home of the rose."

"No."

"From India, then."

"No."

"Ah! one of the isles of Greece."

"I will tell you," she said: "a traveller found it perishing by the road-side on the plain of Rephaim."

"Oh, in Judea!"

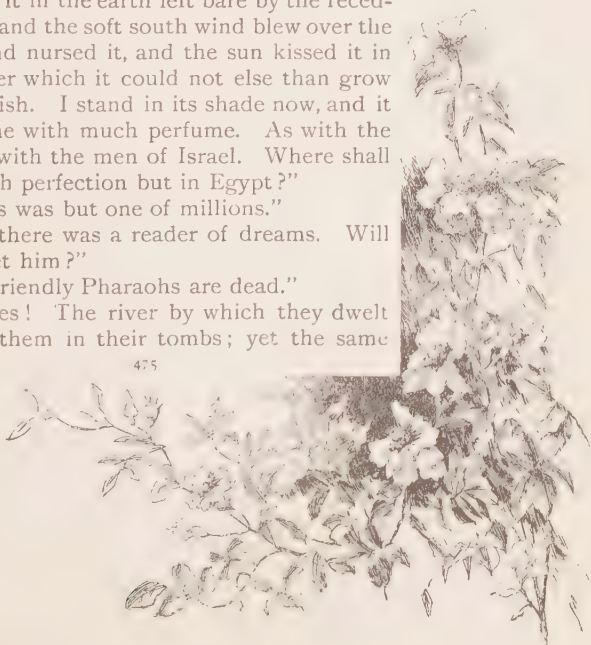
"I put it in the earth left bare by the receding Nile, and the soft south wind blew over the desert and nursed it, and the sun kissed it in pity; after which it could not else than grow and flourish. I stand in its shade now, and it thanks me with much perfume. As with the roses, so with the men of Israel. Where shall they reach perfection but in Egypt?"

"Moses was but one of millions."

"Nay, there was a reader of dreams. Will you forget him?"

"The friendly Pharaohs are dead."

"Ah, yes! The river by which they dwelt sings to them in their tombs; yet the same



sun tempers the same air to the same people."

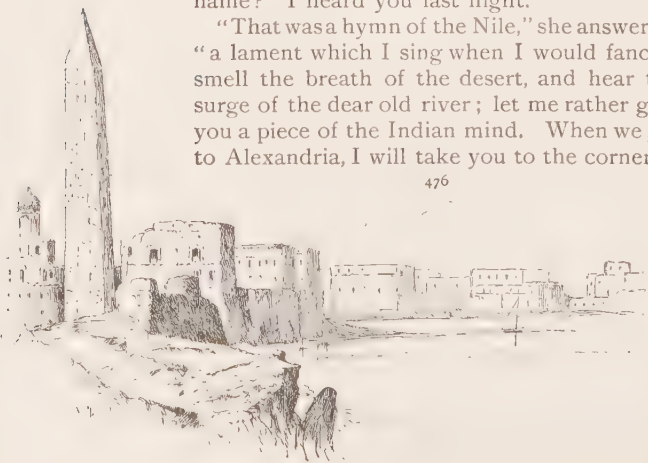
"Alexandria is but a Roman town."

"She has but exchanged sceptres. Cæsar took from her that of the sword, and in its place left that of learning. Go with me to the Bruchesium, and I will show you the college of nations; to the Serapeion, and see the perfection of architecture; to the Library, and read the immortals; to the theatre, and hear the heroics of the Greeks and Hindoos; to the quay, and count the triumphs of commerce; descend with me into the streets, O son of Arrius, and, when the philosophers have dispersed, and taken with them the masters of all the arts, and all the gods have home their votaries, and nothing remains of the day but its pleasures, you shall hear the stories that have amused men from the beginning, and the songs which will never, never die."

As he listened, Ben-Hur was carried back to the night when, in the summer-house in Jerusalem, his mother, in much the same poetry of patriotism, declaimed the departed glories of Israel.

"I see now why you wish to be called Egypt. Will you sing me a song if I call you by that name? I heard you last night."

"That was a hymn of the Nile," she answered, "a lament which I sing when I would fancy I smell the breath of the desert, and hear the surge of the dear old river; let me rather give you a piece of the Indian mind. When we get to Alexandria, I will take you to the corner of



the street where you can hear it from the daughter of the Ganga, who taught it to me. Kapila, you should know, was one of the most revered of the Hindoo sages."

Then, as if it were a natural mode of expression, she began the song.

KAPILA.

I.

Kapila, Kapila, so young and true,
I yearn for a glory like thine,
And hail thee from battle to ask anew,
Can ever thy Valor be mine?

Kapila sat on his charger dun,
A hero never so grave :
Who loveth all things hath fear of none,
'Tis love that maketh me brave.
A woman gave me her soul one day,
The soul of my soul to be alway ;
Thence came my Valor to me,
Go try it—try it—and see.'

II.

Kapila, Kapila, so old and gray,
The queen is calling for me ;
But ere I go hence, I wish thou wouldst say,
How Wisdom first came to thee.

Kapila stood in his temple door,
A priest in eremite guise :
'It did not come as men get their lore,
'Tis faith that maketh me wise.
A woman gave me her heart one day,
The heart of my heart to be alway ;
Thence came my Wisdom to me,
Go try it—try it—and see.'"

Ben-Hur had not time to express his thanks



for the song before the keel of the boat grated upon the underlying sand, and, next moment, the bow ran upon the shore.

"A quick voyage, O Egypt!" he cried.

"And a briefer stay!" she replied, as, with a strong push, the black sent them shooting into the open water again.

"You will give me the rudder now."

"Oh, no," said she, laughing. "To you, the chariot; to me, the boat. We are merely at the lake's end, and the lesson is that I must not sing any more. Having been to Egypt, let us now to the Grove of Daphne."

"Without a song on the way?" he said, in deprecation.

"Tell me something of the Roman from whom you saved us to-day," she asked.

The request struck Ben-Hur unpleasantly.

"I wish this were the Nile," he said, evasively.

"The kings and queens, having slept so long, might come down from their tombs, and ride with us."

"They were of the colossi, and would sink our boat. The pygmies would be preferable. But tell me of the Roman. He is very wicked, is he not?"

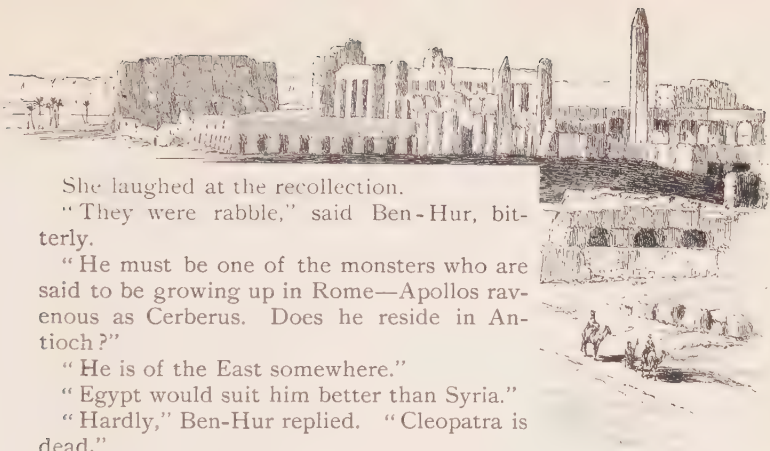
"I cannot say."

"Is he of noble family, and rich?"

"I cannot speak of his riches."

"How beautiful his horses were! and the bed of his chariot was gold, and the wheels ivory. And his audacity! The by-standers laughed as he rode away; they, who were so nearly under his wheels!"





She laughed at the recollection.

"They were rabble," said Ben-Hur, bitterly.

"He must be one of the monsters who are said to be growing up in Rome—Apollon ravenous as Cerberus. Does he reside in Antioch?"

"He is of the East somewhere."

"Egypt would suit him better than Syria."

"Hardly," Ben-Hur replied. "Cleopatra is dead."

That instant the lamps burning before the door of the tent came into view.

"The dower!" she cried.

"Ah, then, we have not been to Egypt. I have not seen Karnak or Philæ or Abydos. This is not the Nile. I have but heard a song of India, and been boating in a dream."

"Philæ—Karnak. Mourn rather that you have not seen the Rameses at Aboo Simbel, looking at which makes it so easy to think of God, the maker of the heavens and earth. Or why should you mourn at all? Let us go on to the river; and if I cannot sing"—she laughed—"because I have said I would not, yet I can tell you stories of Egypt."

"Go on! Aye, till morning comes, and the evening, and the next morning!" he said, vehemently.

"Of what shall my stories be? Of the mathematicians?"

"Oh, no."

"Of the philosophers?"

"No, no."



"Of the magicians and genii?"

"If you will."

"Of war?"

"Yes."

"Of love?"

"Yes."

"I will tell you a cure for love. It is the story of a queen. Listen reverently. The papyrus from which it was taken by the priests of Philæ was wrested from the hand of the heroine herself. It is correct in form, and must be true:

NE-NE-HOFRA.

I.

"There is no parallelism in human lives.

"No life runs a straight line.

"The most perfect life develops as a circle, and terminates in its beginning, making it impossible to say, This is the commencement, that the end.

"Perfect lives are the treasures of God; of great days he wears them on the ring-finger of his heart-hand."

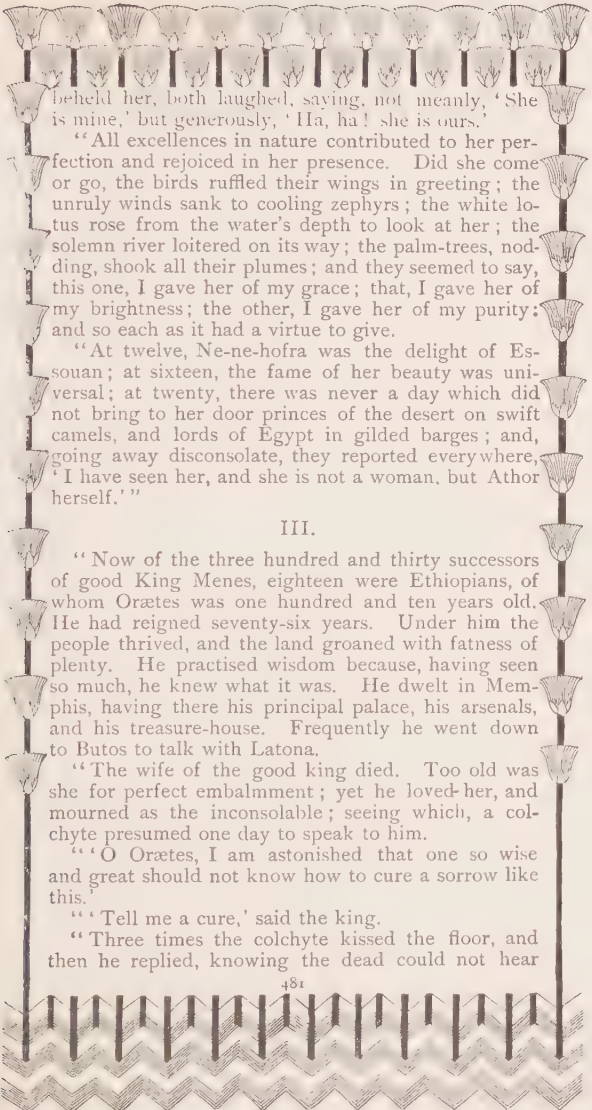
II.

"Ne-ne-hofra dwelt in a house close by Essouan, yet closer to the first cataract—so close, indeed, that the sound of the eternal battle waged there between river and rocks was of the place a part.

"She grew in beauty day by day, so that it was said of her, as of the poppies in her father's garden, What will she not be in the time of blooming?

"Each year of her life was the beginning of a new song more delightful than any of those which went before.

"Child was she of a marriage between the North, bounded by the sea, and the South, bounded by the desert beyond the Luna mountains; and one gave her its passion, the other its genius; so when they



beheld her, both laughed, saying, not meanly, 'She is mine,' but generously, 'Ha, ha! she is ours.'

"All excellences in nature contributed to her perfection and rejoiced in her presence. Did she come or go, the birds ruffled their wings in greeting; the unruly winds sank to cooling zephyrs; the white lotus rose from the water's depth to look at her; the solemn river loitered on its way; the palm-trees, nodding, shook all their plumes; and they seemed to say, this one, I gave her of my grace; that, I gave her of my brightness; the other, I gave her of my purity: and so each as it had a virtue to give.

"At twelve, Ne-ne-hofra was the delight of Es-souan; at sixteen, the fame of her beauty was universal; at twenty, there was never a day which did not bring to her door princes of the desert on swift camels, and lords of Egypt in gilded barges; and, going away disconsolate, they reported everywhere, 'I have seen her, and she is not a woman, but Athor herself.'"

III.

"Now of the three hundred and thirty successors of good King Menes, eighteen were Ethiopians, of whom Orætes was one hundred and ten years old. He had reigned seventy-six years. Under him the people thrived, and the land groaned with fatness of plenty. He practised wisdom because, having seen so much, he knew what it was. He dwelt in Memphis, having there his principal palace, his arsenals, and his treasure-house. Frequently he went down to Butos to talk with Latona.

"The wife of the good king died. Too old was she for perfect embalmmnt; yet he loved her, and mourned as the inconsolable; seeing which, a colchyte presumed one day to speak to him.

"'O Orætes, I am astonished that one so wise and great should not know how to cure a sorrow like this.

"'Tell me a cure,' said the king.

"Three times the colchyte kissed the floor, and then he replied, knowing the dead could not hear



him, 'At Essouan lives Ne-ne-hofra, beautiful as Athor the beautiful. Send for her. She has refused all the lords and princes, and I know not how many kings; but who can say no to Orætes?'

IV.

"Ne-ne-hofra descended the Nile in a barge richer than any ever before seen, attended by an army in barges each but a little less fine. All Nubia and Egypt, and a myriad from Libya, and a host of Troglodytes, and not a few Macrobiani from beyond the Mountains of the Moon, lined the tented shores to see the cortège pass, wafted by perfumed winds and golden oars.

"Through a dromos of sphinxes and couchant double-winged lions she was borne, and set down before Orætes sitting on a throne specially erected at the sculptured pylon of the palace. He raised her up, gave her place by his side, clasped the uræus upon her arm, kissed her, and Ne-ne-hofra was queen of all queens.

"That was not enough for the wise Orætes; he wanted love, and a queen happy in his love. So he dealt with her tenderly, showing her his possessions, cities, palaces, people; his armies, his ships: and with his own hand he led her through his treasure-house, saying, 'O Ne-ne-hofra! but kiss me in love, and they are all thine.'

"And, thinking she could be happy, if she was not then, she kissed him once, twice, thrice—kissed him thrice, his hundred and ten years notwithstanding.

"The first year she was happy, and it was very short; the third year she was wretched, and it was very long; then she was enlightened: that which she thought love of Orætes was only daze of his power. Well for her had the daze endured! Her spirits deserted her; she had long spells of tears, and her women could not remember when they heard her laugh; of the roses on her cheeks only ashes remained; she languished and faded gradually, but certainly. Some said she was haunted by the Erinnyes for



truly to a lover; others, that she was stricken by some god envious of Orætes. Whatever the cause of her decline, the charms of the magicians availed not to restore her, and the prescript of the doctor was equally without virtue. Ne-ne-hofra was given over to die.

“Orætes chose a crypt for her up in the tombs of the queens; and, calling the master sculptors and painters to Memphis, he set them to work upon designs more elaborate than any even in the great galleries of the dead kings.

“‘O thou beautiful as Athor herself, my queen!’ said the king, whose hundred and thirteen years did not lessen his ardor as a lover, ‘Tell me, I pray, the ailment of which, alas! thou art so certainly perishing before my eyes.’

“‘You will not love me any more if I tell you,’ she said, in doubt and fear.

“‘Not love you! I will love you the more. I swear it, by the genii of Amente! by the eye of Osiris, I swear it! Speak!’ he cried, passionate as a lover, authoritative as a king.

“‘Hear, then,’ she said. ‘There is an anchorite, the oldest and holiest of his class, in a cave near Es-souan. His name is Menopha. He was my teacher and guardian. Send for him, O Orætes, and he will tell you that you seek to know; he will also help you find the cure for my affliction.’

“Orætes arose rejoicing. He went away in spirit a hundred years younger than when he came.”

V.

“‘Speak!’ said Orætes to Menopha, in the palace at Memphis.

“And Menopha replied, ‘Most mighty king, if you were young, I should not answer, because I am yet pleased with life; as it is, I will say the queen, like any other mortal, is paying the penalty of a crime.’

“‘A crime!’ exclaimed Orætes, angrily.

“Menopha bowed very low.

“‘Yes; to herself.’



" 'I am not in mood for riddles,' said the king.
" 'What I say is not a riddle, as you shall hear. Ne-ne-hofra grew up under my eyes, and confided every incident of her life to me; among others, that she loved the son of her father's gardener, Barbec by name.'

" Orætes's frown, strangely enough, began to dissipate.

" 'With that love in her heart, O king, she came to you; of that love she is dying.'

" 'Where is the gardener's son now?' asked Orætes.

" 'In Essouan.'

" The king went out and gave two orders. To one oeris he said, 'Go to Essouan and bring hither a youth named Barbec. You will find him in the garden of the queen's father;' to another, 'Assemble workmen and cattle and tools, and construct for me in Lake Chemmis an island, which, though laden with a temple, a palace, and a garden, and all manner of trees bearing fruit, and all manner of vines, shall nevertheless float about as the winds may blow it. Make the island, and let it be fully furnished by the time the moon begins to wane.'

" Then to the queen he said,

" 'Be of cheer. I know all, and have sent for Barbec.'

" Ne-ne-hofra kissed his hands.

" 'You shall have him to yourself, and he you to himself; nor shall any disturb your loves for a year.'

" She kissed his feet; he raised her, and kissed her in return; and the rose came back to her cheek, the scarlet to her lips, and the laughter to her heart."

VI.

" For one year Ne-ne-hofra and Barbec the gardener floated as the winds blew on the island of Chemmis, which became one of the wonders of the world; never a home of love more beautiful; one year, seeing no one and existing for no one but themselves. Then she returned in state to the palace in Memphis.



“ ‘Now whom lovest thou best?’ asked the king.
“She kissed his cheek and said, ‘Take me back,
O good king, for I am cured.’

“Orætes laughed, none the worse, that moment,
of his hundred and fourteen years.

“ ‘Then it is true, as Menopha said: ha, ha, ha!
it is true, the cure of love is love.’

“ ‘Even so,’ she replied.

“Suddenly his manner changed, and his look became terrible.

“ ‘I did not find it so,’ he said.

“She shrank affrighted.

“ ‘Thou guilty!’ he continued. ‘Thy offence to
Orætes the man he forgives; but thy offence to Orætes the king remains to be punished.’

“She cast herself at his feet.

“ ‘Hush!’ he cried. ‘Thou art dead!’

“He clapped his hands, and a terrible procession came in—a procession of parachistes, or embalmers, each with some implement or material of his loathsome art.

“The king pointed to Ne-ne-hofra.

“ ‘She is dead. Do thy work well.’ ”

VII.

“Ne-ne-hofra the beautiful, after seventy-two days, was carried to the crypt chosen for her the year before, and laid with her queenly predecessors; yet there was no funeral procession in her honor across the sacred lake.”

At the conclusion of the story, Ben-Hur was sitting at the Egyptian's feet, and her hand upon the tiller was covered by his hand.

“Menopha was wrong,” he said.

“How?”

“Love lives by loving.”

“Then there is no cure for it?”

“Yes. Orætes found the cure.”



"What was it?"

"Death."

"You are a good listener, O son of Arrius."

And so with conversation and stories, they whiled the hours away. As they stepped ashore, she said,

"To-morrow we go to the city."

"But you will be at the games?" he asked.

"Oh yes."

"I will send you my colors."

With that they separated.

CHAPTER IV

MESSALA ON GUARD

ILDERIM returned to the dower next day about the third hour. As he dismounted, a man whom he recognized as of his own tribe came to him and said, "O sheik, I was bidden give thee this package, with request that thou read it at once. If there be answer, I was to wait thy pleasure."

Ilderim gave the package immediate attention. The seal was already broken. The address ran, "To Valerius Gratus at Cæsarea."

"Abaddon take him!" growled the sheik, at discovering a letter in Latin.

Had the missive been in Greek or Arabic, he could have read it; as it was, the utmost he could make out was the signature in bold Roman letters — MESSALA — whereat his eyes twinkled.

"Where is the young Jew?" he asked.

"In the field with the horses," a servant replied.

The sheik replaced the papyrus in its envelop, and, tucking the package under his girdle, remounted the horse. That moment a stranger made his appearance, coming, apparently, from the city.

"I am looking for Sheik Ilderim, surnamed the Generous," the stranger said.

His language and attire bespoke him a Roman.

What he could not read, he yet could speak; so the old Arab answered, with dignity, "I am Sheik Ilderim."

The man's eyes fell; he raised them again, and said, with forced composure, "I heard you had need of a driver for the games."

Ilderim's lip under the white mustache curled contemptuously.

"Go thy way," he said. "I have a driver."

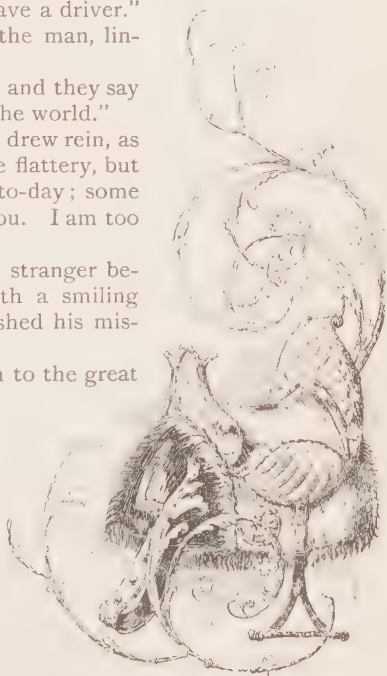
He turned to ride away, but the man, lingering, spoke again.

"Sheik, I am a lover of horses, and they say you have the most beautiful in the world."

The old man was touched; he drew rein, as if on the point of yielding to the flattery, but finally replied, "Not to-day, not to-day; some other time I will show them to you. I am too busy just now."

He rode to the field, while the stranger betook himself to town again with a smiling countenance. He had accomplished his mission.

And every day thereafter, down to the great



day of the games, a man—sometimes two or three men—came to the sheik at the Orchard, pretending to seek an engagement as driver.

In such manner Messala kept watch over Ben-Hur.

CHAPTER V

ILDERIM AND BEN-HUR DELIBERATE

THE sheik waited, well satisfied, until Ben-Hur drew his horses off the field for the forenoon—well satisfied, for he had seen them, after being put through all the other paces, run full speed in such manner that it did not seem there were one the slowest and another the fastest—run, in other words, as if the four were one.

“This afternoon, O sheik, I will give Sirius back to you.” Ben-Hur patted the neck of the old horse as he spoke. “I will give him back, and take to the chariot.”

“So soon?” Ilderim asked.

“With such as these, good sheik, one day suffices. They are not afraid; they have a man’s intelligence, and they love the exercise. This one,” he shook a rein over the back of the youngest of the four—“you called him Aldebaran, I believe—is the swiftest; in once round a stadium he would lead the others thrice his length.”

Ilderim pulled his beard, and said, with twinkling eyes, “Aldebaran is the swiftest; but what of the slowest?”

“This is he.” Ben-Hur shook the rein over



Antares. "This is he: but he will win, for, look you, sheik, he will run his utmost all day—all day; and, as the sun goes down, he will reach his swiftest."

"Right again," said Ilderim.

"I have but one fear, O sheik."

The sheik became doubly serious.

"In his greed of triumph, a Roman cannot keep honor pure. In the games—all of them, mark you—their tricks are infinite; in chariot-racing their knavery extends to everything—from horse to driver, from driver to master. Wherefore, good sheik, look well to all thou hast; from this till the trial is over, let no stranger so much as see the horses. Would you be perfectly safe, do more—keep watch over them with armed hand as well as sleepless eye; then I will have no fear of the end."

At the door of the tent they dismounted.

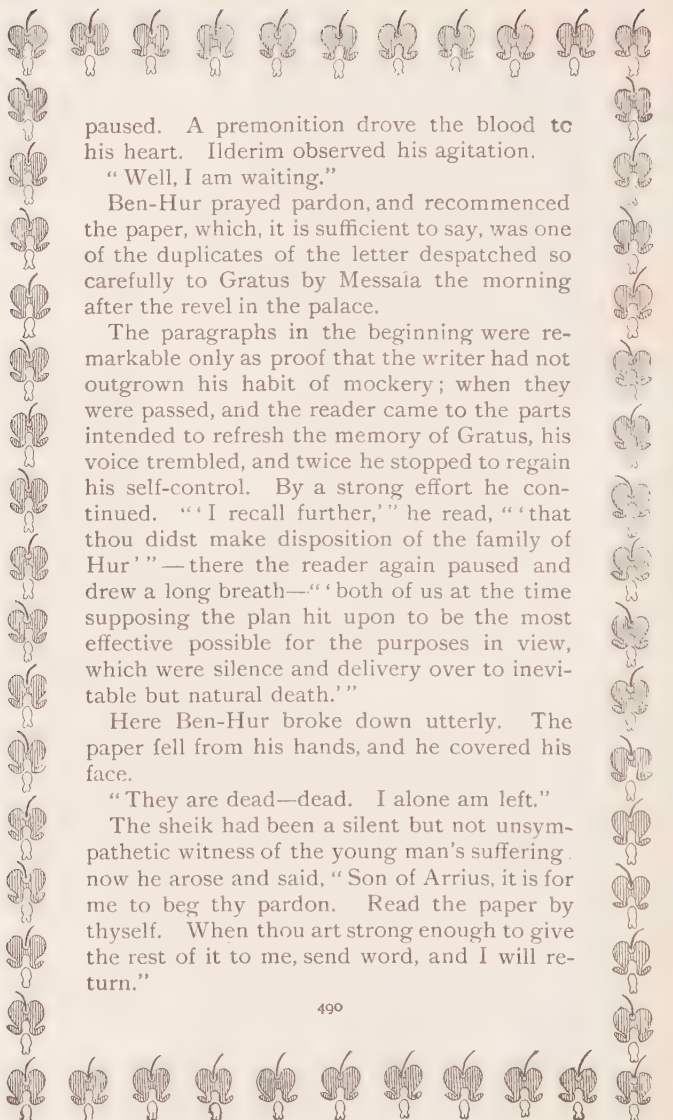
"What you say shall be attended to. By the splendor of God, no hand shall come near them except it belong to one of the faithful. To-night I will set watches. But, son of Arrius"—Ilderim drew forth the package, and opened it slowly, while they walked to the divan and seated themselves—"son of Arrius, see thou here, and help me with thy Latin."

He passed the despatch to Ben-Hur.

"There; read—and read aloud, rendering what thou findest into the tongue of thy fathers. Latin is an abomination."

Ben-Hur was in good spirits, and began the reading carelessly. "Messala to Gratus!" He





paused. A premonition drove the blood to his heart. Ilderim observed his agitation.

"Well, I am waiting."

Ben-Hur prayed pardon, and recommenced the paper, which, it is sufficient to say, was one of the duplicates of the letter despatched so carefully to Gratus by Messala the morning after the revel in the palace.

The paragraphs in the beginning were remarkable only as proof that the writer had not outgrown his habit of mockery; when they were passed, and the reader came to the parts intended to refresh the memory of Gratus, his voice trembled, and twice he stopped to regain his self-control. By a strong effort he continued. "'I recall further,'" he read, "'that thou didst make disposition of the family of Hur'"—there the reader again paused and drew a long breath—"both of us at the time supposing the plan hit upon to be the most effective possible for the purposes in view, which were silence and delivery over to inevitable but natural death.'"

Here Ben-Hur broke down utterly. The paper fell from his hands, and he covered his face.

"They are dead—dead. I alone am left."

The sheik had been a silent but not unsympathetic witness of the young man's suffering. now he arose and said, "Son of Arrius, it is for me to beg thy pardon. Read the paper by thyself. When thou art strong enough to give the rest of it to me, send word, and I will return."

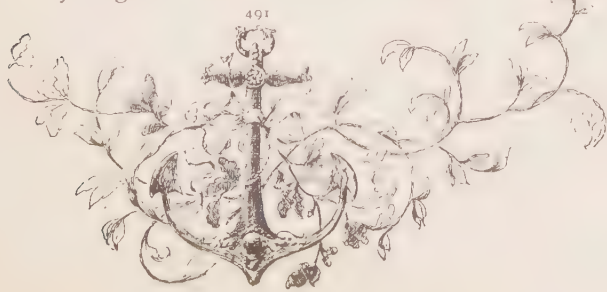
He went out of the tent, and nothing in all his life became him better.

Ben-Hur flung himself on the divan and gave way to his feelings. When somewhat recovered, he recollected that a portion of the letter remained unread, and, taking it up, he resumed the reading. "Thou wilt remember," the missive ran, "what thou didst with the mother and sister of the malefactor; yet, if now I yield to a desire to learn if they be living or dead" — Ben-Hur started, and read again, and then again, and at last broke into exclamation. "He does not know they are dead; he does not know it! Blessed be the name of the Lord! there is yet hope." He finished the sentence, and was strengthened by it, and went on bravely to the end of the letter.

"They are not dead," he said, after reflection; "they are not dead, or he would have heard of it."

A second reading, more careful than the first, confirmed him in the opinion. Then he sent for the sheik.

"In coming to your hospitable tent, O sheik," he said, calmly, when the Arab was seated and they were alone, "it was not in my mind to speak of myself further than to assure you I had sufficient training to be intrusted with your horses. I declined to tell you my history. But the chances which have sent this paper to my hand and given it to me to be read are so strange that I feel bidden to trust you with everything. And I am the more inclined to





do so by knowledge here conveyed that we are both of us threatened by the same enemy, against whom it is needful that we make common cause. I will read the letter and give you explanation; after which you will not wonder I was so moved. If you thought me weak or childish, you will then excuse me."

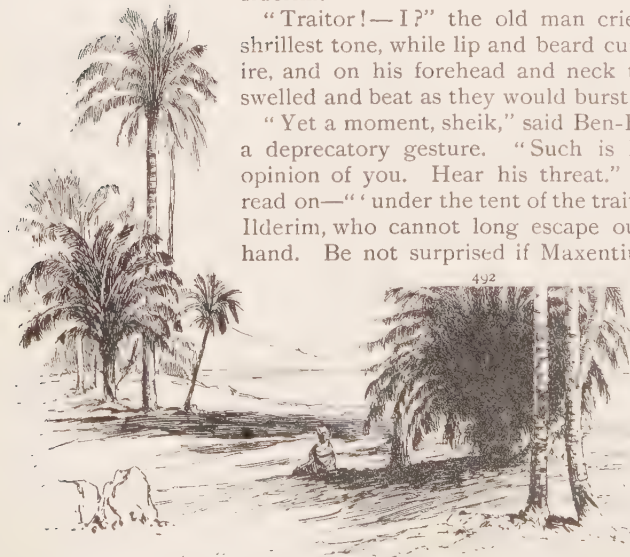
The sheik held his peace, listening closely, until Ben-Hur came to the paragraph in which he was particularly mentioned: "'I saw the Jew yesterday in the Grove of Daphne;'" so ran the part, "'and if he be not there now, he is certainly in the neighborhood, making it easy for me to keep him in eye. Indeed, wert thou to ask me where he is now, I should say, with the most positive assurance, he is to be found at the old Orchard of Palms.'"

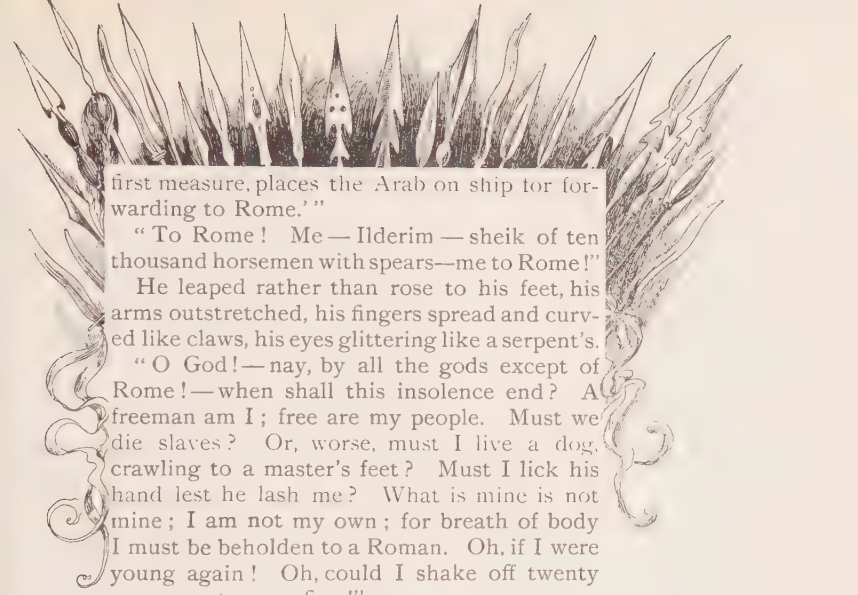
"A—h!" exclaimed Ilderim, in such a tone one might hardly say he was more surprised than angry; at the same time, he clutched his beard.

"'At the old Orchard of Palms,'" Ben-Hur repeated, "'under the tent of the traitor Sheik Ilderim.'"

"Traitor!—I?" the old man cried, in his shrillest tone, while lip and beard curled with ire, and on his forehead and neck the veins swelled and beat as they would burst.

"Yet a moment, sheik," said Ben-Hur, with a deprecatory gesture. "Such is Messala's opinion of you. Hear his threat." And he read on—" 'under the tent of the traitor Sheik Ilderim, who cannot long escape our strong hand. Be not surprised if Maxentius, as his





first measure, places the Arab on ship for forwarding to Rome.'"

"To Rome! Me—Ilderim—sheik of ten thousand horsemen with spears—me to Rome!"

He leaped rather than rose to his feet, his arms outstretched, his fingers spread and curved like claws, his eyes glittering like a serpent's.

"O God!—nay, by all the gods except of Rome!—when shall this insolence end? A freeman am I; free are my people. Must we die slaves? Or, worse, must I live a dog, crawling to a master's feet? Must I lick his hand lest he lash me? What is mine is not mine; I am not my own; for breath of body I must be beholden to a Roman. Oh, if I were young again! Oh, could I shake off twenty years—or ten—or five!"

He ground his teeth and shook his hands overhead; then, under the impulse of another idea, he walked away and back again to Ben-Hur swiftly, and caught his shoulder with a strong grasp.

"If I were as thou, son of Arrius—as young, as strong, as practised in arms; if I had a motive hissing me to revenge—a motive, like thine, great enough to make hate holy—Away with disguise on thy part and on mine! Son of Hur, son of Hur, I say—"

At that name all the currents of Ben-Hur's blood stopped; surprised, bewildered, he gazed into the Arab's eyes, now close to his, and fiercely bright.

"Son of Hur, I say, were I as thou, with half thy wrongs, bearing about with me memories

like thine, I would not, I could not, rest." Never pausing, his words following each other torrent-like, the old man swept on. "To all my grievances, I would add those of the world, and devote myself to vengeance. From land to land I would go firing all mankind. No war for freedom but should find me engaged; no battle against Rome in which I would not bear a part. I would turn Parthian, if I could not better. If men failed me, still I would not give over the effort—ha, ha, ha! By the splendor of God! I would herd with wolves, and make friends of lions and tigers, in hope of marshaling them against the common enemy. I would use every weapon. So my victims were Romans, I would rejoice in slaughter. Quarter I would not ask; quarter I would not give. To the flames everything Roman; to the sword every Roman born. Of nights I would pray the gods, the good and the bad alike, to lend me their special terrors—tempests, drought, heat, cold, and all the nameless poisons they let loose in air, all the thousand things of which men die on sea and on land. Oh, I could not sleep. I—I—"

The sheik stopped for want of breath, panting, wringing his hands. And, sooth to say, of all the passionate burst Ben-Hur retained but a vague impression wrought by fiery eyes, a piercing voice, and a rage too intense for coherent expression.

For the first time in years, the desolate youth heard himself addressed by his proper name. One man, at least, knew him, and acknowledged



it without demand of identity ; and he an Arab fresh from the desert !

How came the man by his knowledge ? The letter ? No. It told the cruelties from which his family had suffered ; it told the story of his own misfortunes, but it did not say he was the very victim whose escape from doom was the theme of the heartless narrative. That was the point of explanation he had notified the sheik would follow the reading of the letter. He was pleased, and thrilled with hope restored, yet kept an air of calmness.

“ Good sheik, tell me how you came by this letter.”

“ My people keep the roads between cities,” Ilderim answered, bluntly. “ They took it from a courier.”

“ Are they known to be thy people ?”

“ No. To the world they are robbers, whom it is mine to catch and slay.”

“ Again, sheik. You call me son of Hur—my father’s name. I did not think myself known to a person on earth. How came you by the knowledge ?”

Ilderim hesitated ; but, rallying, he answered, “ I know you, yet I am not free to tell you more.”

“ Some one holds you in restraint ?”

The sheik closed his mouth, and walked away ; but, observing Ben-Hur’s disappointment, he came back, and said, “ Let us say no more about the matter now. I will go to town ; when I return, I may talk to you fully. Give me the letter.”

Ilderim rolled the papyrus carefully, restored



it to its envelopes, and became once more all energy.

"What sayest thou?" he asked, while waiting for his horse and retinue. "I told what I would do, were I thou, and thou hast made no answer."

"I intended to answer, sheik, and I will." Ben-Hur's countenance and voice changed with the feeling invoked. "All thou hast said, I will do—all at least in the power of a man. I devoted myself to vengeance long ago. Every hour of the five years passed I have lived with no other thought. I have taken no respite. I have had no pleasures of youth. The blandishments of Rome were not for me. I wanted her to educate me for revenge. I resorted to her most famous masters and professors—not those of rhetoric or philosophy: alas! I had no time for them. The arts essential to a fighting-man were my desire. I associated with gladiators, and with winners of prizes in the Circus; and they were my teachers. The drill-masters in the great camp accepted me as a scholar, and were proud of my attainments in their line. O sheik, I am a soldier; but the things of which I dream require me to be a captain. With that thought, I have taken part in the campaign against the Parthians; when it is over, then, if the Lord spare my life and strength—then—he raised his clenched hands, and spoke vehemently—"then I will be an enemy Roman-taught in all things; then Rome shall account to me in Roman lives for her ills. You have my answer, sheik."



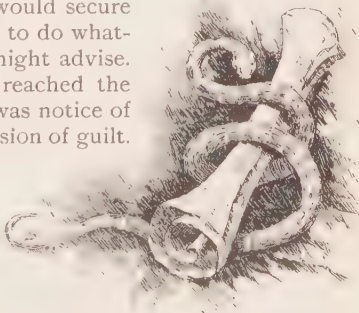
Ilderim put an arm over his shoulder, and kissed him, saying, passionately, "If thy God favor thee not, son of Hur, it is because he is dead. Take thou this from me—sworn to, if so thy preference run: thou shalt have my hands, and their fulness—men, horses, camels, and the desert for preparation. I swear it! For the present, enough. Thou shalt see or hear from me before night."

Turning abruptly off, the sheik was speedily on the road to the city.

CHAPTER VI TRAINING THE FOUR

THE intercepted letter was conclusive upon a number of points of great interest to Ben-Hur. It had all the effect of a confession that the writer was a party to the putting-away of the family with murderous intent; that he had sanctioned the plan adopted for the purpose; that he had received a portion of the proceeds of the confiscation, and was yet in enjoyment of his part; that he dreaded the unexpected appearance of what he was pleased to call the chief malefactor, and accepted it as a menace; that he contemplated such further action as would secure him in the future, and was ready to do whatever his accomplice in Cæsarea might advise.

And, now that the letter had reached the hand of him really its subject, it was notice of danger to come, as well as a confession of guilt.





So when Ilderim left the tent, Ben-Hur had much to think about, requiring immediate action. His enemies were as adroit and powerful as any in the East. If they were afraid of him, he had greater reason to be afraid of them. He strove earnestly to reflect upon the situation, but could not; his feelings constantly overwhelmed him. There was a certain qualified pleasure in the assurance that his mother and sister were alive; and it mattered little that the foundation of the assurance was a mere inference. That there was one person who could tell him where they were seemed to his hope so long deferred as if discovery were now close at hand. These were mere causes of feeling; underlying them, it must be confessed he had a superstitious fancy that God was about to make ordination in his behalf, in which event faith whispered him to stand still.

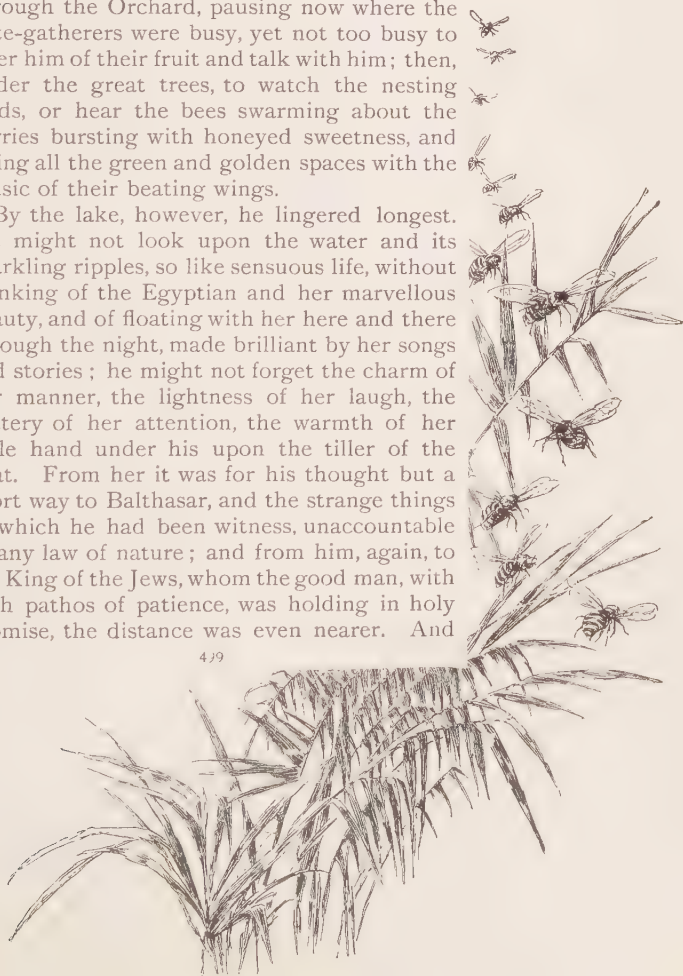
Occasionally, referring to the words of Ilderim, he wondered whence the Arab derived his information about him; not from Malluch certainly; nor from Simonides, whose interests, all adverse, would hold him dumb. Could Messala have been the informant? No, no: disclosure might be dangerous in that quarter. Conjecture was vain; at the same time, often as Ben-Hur was beaten back from the solution, he was consoled with the thought that whoever the person with the knowledge might be, he was a friend, and, being such, would reveal himself in good time. A little more waiting—a little more patience. Possibly the errand of the sheik was to see the worthy;

possibly the letter might precipitate a full disclosure.

And patient he would have been if only he could have believed Tirzah and his mother were waiting for him under circumstances permitting hope on their part strong as his; if, in other words, conscience had not stung him with accusations respecting them.

To escape such accusations, he wandered far through the Orchard, pausing now where the date-gatherers were busy, yet not too busy to offer him of their fruit and talk with him; then, under the great trees, to watch the nesting birds, or hear the bees swarming about the berries bursting with honeyed sweetness, and filling all the green and golden spaces with the music of their beating wings.

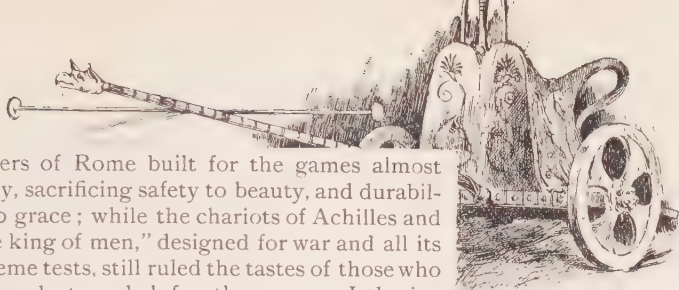
By the lake, however, he lingered longest. He might not look upon the water and its sparkling ripples, so like sensuous life, without thinking of the Egyptian and her marvellous beauty, and of floating with her here and there through the night, made brilliant by her songs and stories; he might not forget the charm of her manner, the lightness of her laugh, the flattery of her attention, the warmth of her little hand under his upon the tiller of the boat. From her it was for his thought but a short way to Balthasar, and the strange things of which he had been witness, unaccountable by any law of nature; and from him, again, to the King of the Jews, whom the good man, with such pathos of patience, was holding in holy promise, the distance was even nearer. And



there his mind stayed, finding in the mysteries of that personage a satisfaction answering well for the rest he was seeking. Because, it may have been, nothing is so easy as denial of an idea not agreeable to our wishes, he rejected the definition given by Balthasar of the kingdom the king was coming to establish. A kingdom of souls, if not intolerable to his Sadducean faith, seemed to him but an abstraction drawn from the depths of a devotion too fond and dreamy. A kingdom of Judea, on the other hand, was more than comprehensible: such had been, and, if only for that reason, might be again. And it suited his pride to think of a new kingdom broader of domain, richer in power, and of a more unapproachable splendor than the old one; of a new king wiser and mightier than Solomon—a new king, under whom, especially, he could find both service and revenge. In that mood he returned to the dower.

The mid-day meal disposed of, still further to occupy himself, Ben-Hur had the chariot rolled out into the sunlight for inspection. The word but poorly conveys the careful study the vehicle underwent. No point or part of it escaped him. With a pleasure which will be better understood hereafter, he saw the pattern was Greek, in his judgment preferable to the Roman in many respects; it was wider between the wheels, and lower and stronger, and the disadvantage of greater weight would be more than compensated by the greater endurance of his Arabs. Speaking generally, the carriage-





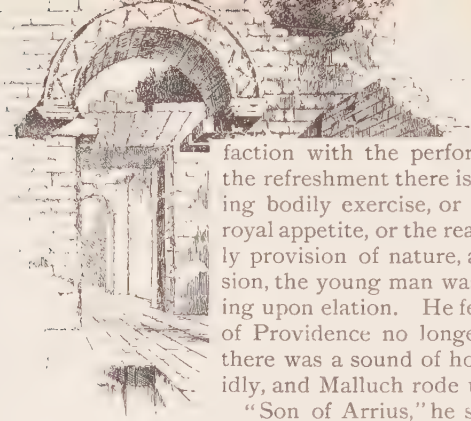
makers of Rome built for the games almost solely, sacrificing safety to beauty, and durability to grace ; while the chariots of Achilles and "the king of men," designed for war and all its extreme tests, still ruled the tastes of those who met and struggled for the crowns Isthmian and Olympic.

Next he brought the horses, and, hitching them to the chariot, drove to the field of exercise, where, hour after hour, he practised them in movement under the yoke. When he came away in the evening, it was with restored spirit, and a fixed purpose to defer action in the matter of Messala until the race was won or lost. He could not forego the pleasure of meeting his adversary under the eyes of the East ; that there might be other competitors seemed not to enter his thought. His confidence in the result was absolute ; no doubt of his own skill ; and as to the four, they were his full partners in the glorious game.

"Let him look to it, let him look to it ! Ha, Antares—Aldebaran ! Shall he not, O honest Rigel ? And thou, Atair, king among coursers, shall he not beware of us ? Ha, ha ! good hearts !"

So in rests he passed from horse to horse, speaking, not as a master, but the senior of as many brethren.

After nightfall, Ben-Hur sat by the door of the tent waiting for Ilderim, not yet returned from the city. He was not impatient, or vexed, or doubtful. The sheik would be heard from, at least. Indeed, whether it was from satis-



faction with the performance of the four, or the refreshment there is in cold water succeeding bodily exercise, or supper partaken with royal appetite, or the reaction which, as a kindly provision of nature, always follows depression, the young man was in good-humor verging upon elation. He felt himself in the hands of Providence no longer his enemy. At last there was a sound of horse's feet coming rapidly, and Malluch rode up.

"Son of Arrius," he said, cheerily, after salutation, "I salute you for Sheik Ilderim, who requests you to mount and go to the city. He is waiting for you."

Ben-Hur asked no questions, but went in where the horses were feeding. Aldebaran came to him, as if offering his service. He played with him lovingly, but passed on, and chose another, not of the four—they were sacred to the race. Very shortly the two were on the road, going swiftly and in silence.

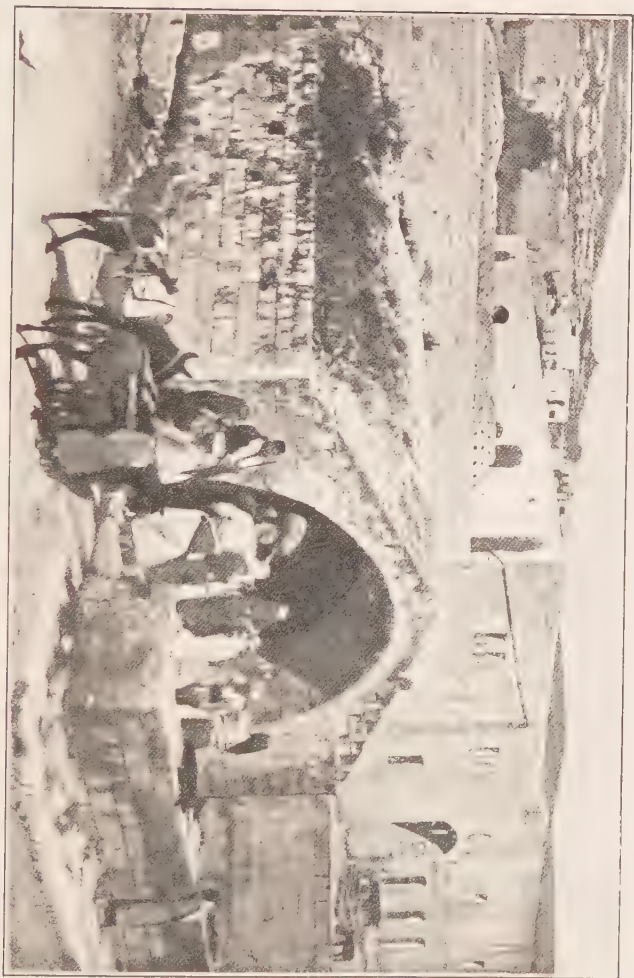
Some distance below the Seleucian Bridge, they crossed the river by a ferry, and, riding far round on the right bank, and recrossing by another ferry, entered the city from the west. The detour was long, but Ben-Hur accepted it as a precaution for which there was good reason.

Down to Simonides' landing they rode, and in front of the great warehouse, under the bridge, Malluch drew rein.

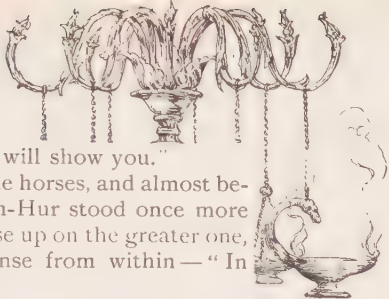
"We are come," he said. "Dismount."

Ben-Hur recognized the place.

'Where is the sheik?' he asked.



FOUNTAIN AT NAZARETH



"Come with me. I will show you."

A watchman took the horses, and almost before he realized it Ben-Hur stood once more at the door of the house up on the greater one, listening to the response from within—"In God's name, enter."

CHAPTER VII

SIMONIDES RENDERS ACCOUNT



MALLUCH stopped at the door; Ben-Hur entered alone.

The room was the same in which he had formerly interviewed Simonides, and it had been in nowise changed, except now, close by the arm-chair, a polished brazen rod, set on a broad wooden pedestal, arose higher than a tall man, holding lamps of silver on sliding arms, half a dozen or more in number, and all burning. The light was clear, bringing into view the panelling on the walls, the cornice with its row of gilded balls, and the dome dully tinted with violet mica.

Within, a few steps, Ben-Hur stopped.

Three persons were present, looking at him—Simonides, Ilderim, and Esther.

He glanced hurriedly from one to another, as if to find answer to the question half formed in his mind, What business can these have with me? He became calm, with every sense on the alert, for the question was succeeded by another, Are they friends or enemies?

At length his eyes rested upon Esther.



The men returned his look kindly ; in her face there was something more than kindness—something too spirituel for definition, which yet went to his inner consciousness without definition.

Shall it be said, good reader? Back of his gaze there was a comparison in which the Egyptian arose and set herself over against the gentle Jewess ; but it lived an instant, and as is the habit of such comparisons, passed away without a conclusion.

“Son of Hur—”

The guest turned to the speaker.

“Son of Hur,” said Simonides, repeating the address slowly, and with distinct emphasis, as if to impress all its meaning upon him most interested in understanding it, “take thou the peace of the Lord God of our fathers—take it from me.” He paused, then added, “From me and mine.”

The speaker sat in his chair ; there were the royal head, the bloodless face, the masterful air, under the influence of which visitors forgot the broken limbs and distorted body of the man. The full black eyes gazed out under the white brows steadily, but not sternly. A moment thus, then he crossed his hands upon his breast.

The action, taken with the salutation, could not be misunderstood, and was not.

“Simonides,” Ben-Hur answered, much moved, “the holy peace you tender is accepted. As son to father, I return it to you. Only let there be perfect understanding between us.”



Thus delicately he sought to put aside the submission of the merchant, and, in place of the relation of master and servant, substitute one higher and holier.

Simonides let fall his hands, and, turning to Esther, said, "A seat for the master, daughter."

She hastened, and brought a stool, and stood, with suffused face, looking from one to the other—from Ben-Hur to Simonides, from Simonides to Ben-Hur; and they waited, each declining the superiority direction would imply. When at length the pause began to be embarrassing, Ben-Hur advanced, and gently took the stool from her, and, going to the chair, placed it at the merchant's feet.

"I will sit here," he said.

His eyes met hers—an instant only; but both were better of the look. He recognized her gratitude, she his generosity and forbearance.

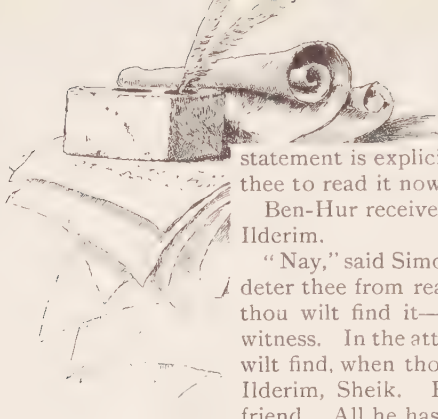
Simonides bowed his acknowledgment.

"Esther, child, bring me the paper," he said, with a breath of relief.

She went to a panel in the wall, opened it, took out a roll of papyri, and brought and gave it to him.

"Thou saidst well, son of Hur," Simonides began, while unrolling the sheets. "Let us understand each other. In anticipation of the demand—which I would have made hadst thou waived it—I have here a statement covering everything necessary to the understanding required. I could see but two points involved—the property first, and then our relation. The





statement is explicit as to both. Will it please thee to read it now?"

Ben-Hur received the papers, but glanced at Ilderim.

"Nay," said Simonides, "the sheik shall not deter thee from reading. The account—such thou wilt find it—is of a nature requiring a witness. In the attesting place at the end thou wilt find, when thou comest to it, the name—Ilderim, Sheik. He knows all. He is thy friend. All he has been to me, that will he be to thee also."

Simonides looked at the Arab, nodding pleasantly, and the latter gravely returned the nod, saying, "Thou hast said."

Ben-Hur replied, "I know already the excellence of his friendship, and have yet to prove myself worthy of it." Immediately he continued, "Later, O Simonides, I will read the papers carefully; for the present, do thou take them, and if thou be not too weary, give me their substance."

Simonides took back the roll.

"Here, Esther, stand by me and receive the sheets, lest they fall into confusion."

She took place by his chair, letting her right arm fall lightly across his shoulder, so, when he spoke, the account seemed to have rendition from both of them jointly.

"This," said Simonides, drawing out the first leaf, "shows the money I had of thy father's, being the amount saved from the Romans; there was no property saved, only money, and that the robbers would have secured but for

our Jewish custom of bills of exchange. The amount saved, being sums I drew from Rome, Alexandria, Damascus, Carthage, Valentia, and elsewhere within the circle of trade, was one hundred and twenty talents Jewish money."

He gave the sheet to Esther, and took the next one.

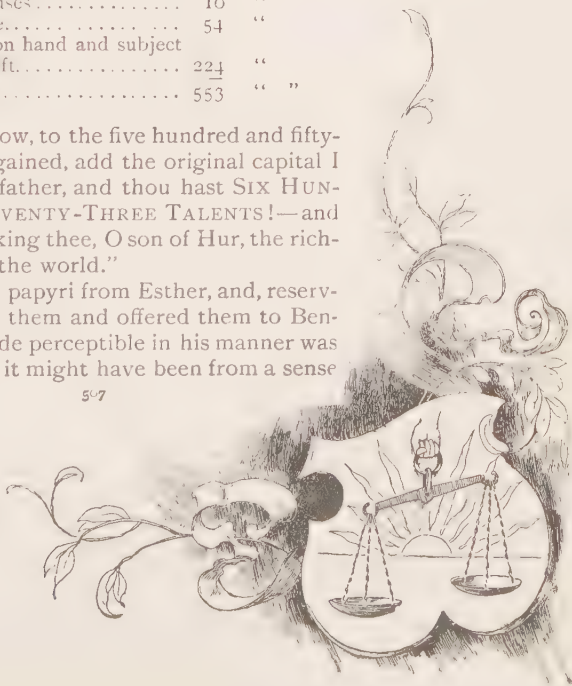
"With that amount—one hundred and twenty talents—I charged myself. Hear now my credits. I use the word, as thou wilt see, with reference rather to the proceeds gained from the use of the money."

From separate sheets he then read footings, which, fractions omitted, were as follows :

" C.R.			
By ships.....	60	talents.	
" goods in store.....	110	"	
" cargoes in transit.....	75	"	
" camels, horses, etc.....	20	"	
" warehouses.....	10	"	
" bills due.....	54	"	
" money on hand and subject			
to draft.....	22½	"	
Total.....	553	" "	

"To these now, to the five hundred and fifty-three talents gained, add the original capital I had from thy father, and thou hast SIX HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-THREE TALENTS!—and all thine—making thee, O son of Hur, the richest subject in the world."

He took the papyri from Esther, and, reserving one, rolled them and offered them to Ben-Hur. The pride perceptible in his manner was not offensive ; it might have been from a sense





of duty well done ; it might have been for Ben-Hur without reference to himself.

"And there is nothing," he added, dropping his voice, but not his eyes—"there is nothing now thou mayst not do."

The moment was one of absorbing interest to all present. Simonides crossed his hands upon his breast again ; Esther was anxious ; Ilderim nervous. A man is never so on trial as in the moment of excessive good-fortune.

Taking the roll, Ben-Hur arose, struggling with emotion.

"All this is to me as a light from heaven, sent to drive away a night which has been so long I feared it would never end, and so dark I had lost the hope of seeing," he said, with a husky voice. "I give first thanks to the Lord, who has not abandoned me, and my next to thee, O Simonides. Thy faithfulness outweighs the cruelty of others, and redeems our human nature. 'There is nothing I cannot do : ' be it so. Shall any man in this my hour of such mighty privilege be more generous than I ? Serve me as a witness now, Sheik Ilderim. Hear thou my words as I shall speak them—hear and remember. And thou, Esther, good angel of this good man ! hear thou also."

He stretched his hand with the roll to Simonides.

"The things these papers take into account—all of them : ships, houses, goods, camels, horses, money ; the least as well as the greatest—give I back to thee, O Simonides, making

them all thine, and sealing them to thee and thine forever."

Esther smiled through her tears; Ilderim pulled his beard with rapid motion, his eyes glistening like beads of jet. Simonides alone was calm.

"Sealing them to thee and thine forever," Ben-Hur continued, with better control of himself, "with one exception, and upon one condition."

The breath of the listeners waited upon his words.

"The hundred and twenty talents which were my father's thou shalt return to me."

Ilderim's countenance brightened.

"And thou shalt join me in search of my mother and sister, holding all thine subject to the expense of discovery, even as I will hold mine."

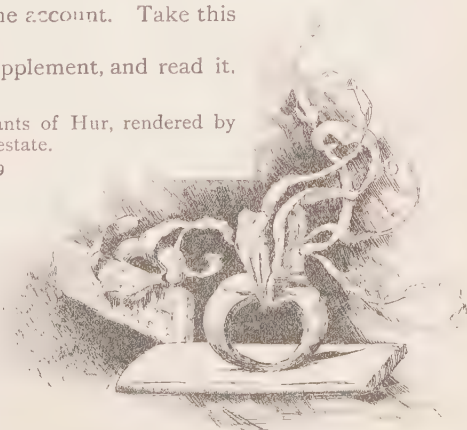
Simonides was much affected. Stretching out his hand, he said, "I see thy spirit, son of Hur, and I am grateful to the Lord that he hath sent thee to me such as thou art. If I served well thy father in life, and his memory afterwards, be not afraid of default to thee; yet must I say the exception cannot stand."

Exhibiting, then, the reserved sheet, he continued,

"Thou hast not all the account. Take this and read—read aloud."

Ben-Hur took the supplement, and read it.

"Statement of the servants of Hur, rendered by Simonides, steward of the estate.



“1. Amrah, Egyptian, keeping the palace in Jerusalem.

“2. Simonides, the steward, in Antioch.

“3. Esther, daughter of Simonides.”

Now, in all his thoughts of Simonides, not once had it entered Ben-Hur's mind that, by the law, a daughter followed the parent's condition. In all his visions of her, the sweet-faced Esther had figured as the rival of the Egyptian, and an object of possible love. He shrank from the revelation so suddenly brought him, and looked at her blushing; and, blushing, she dropped her eyes before him. Then he said, while the papyrus rolled itself together,

“A man with six hundred talents is indeed rich, and may do what he pleases; but, rarer than the money, more priceless than the property, is the mind which amassed the wealth, and the heart it could not corrupt when amassed. O Simonides—and thou, fair Esther—fear not. Sheik Ilderim here shall be witness that in the same moment ye were declared my servants, that moment I declared ye free; and what I declare, that will I put in writing. Is it not enough? Can I do more?”

“Son of Hur,” said Simonides, “verily thou dost make servitude lightsome. I was wrong; there are some things thou canst not do: thou canst not make us free in law. I am thy servant forever, because I went to the door with thy father one day, and in my ear the awl-marks yet abide.”

“Did my father that?”

“Judge him not,” cried Simonides, quickly.



"He accepted me a servant of that class because I prayed him to do so. I never repented the step. It was the price I paid for Rachel, the mother of my child here; for Rachel, who would not be my wife unless I became what she was."

"Was she a servant forever?"

"Even so."

Ben-Hur walked the floor in pain of impotent wish.

"I was rich before," he said, stopping suddenly. "I was rich with the gifts of the generous Arrius; now comes this greater fortune, and the mind which achieved it. Is there not a purpose of God in it all? Counsel me, O Simonides! Help me to see the right and do it. Help me to be worthy my name, and what thou art in law to me, that will I be to thee in fact and deed. I will be thy servant forever."

Simonides' face actually glowed.

"O son of my dead master! I will do better than help; I will serve thee with all my might of mind and heart. Body, I have not; it perished in thy cause; but with mind and heart I will serve thee. I swear it, by the altar of our God, and the gifts upon the altar! Only make me formally what I have assumed to be."

"Name it," said Ben-Hur, eagerly.

"As steward the care of the property will be mine."

"Count thyself steward now; or wilt thou have it in writing?"

"Thy word simply is enough; it was so with the father, and I will not more from the son."



And now, if the understanding be perfect"—Simonides paused.

"It is with me," said Ben-Hur.

"And thou, daughter of Rachel, speak!" said Simonides, lifting her arm from his shoulder.

Esther, left thus alone, stood a moment abashed, her color coming and going; then she went to Ben-Hur, and said, with a womanliness singularly sweet, "I am not better than my mother was; and, as she is gone, I pray you, O my master, let me care for my father."

Ben-Hur took her hand, and led her back to the chair, saying, "Thou art a good child. Have thy will."

Simonides replaced her arm upon his neck, and there was silence for a time in the room.

CHAPTER VIII
SPIRITUAL OR POLITICAL?—SIMONIDES
ARGUES

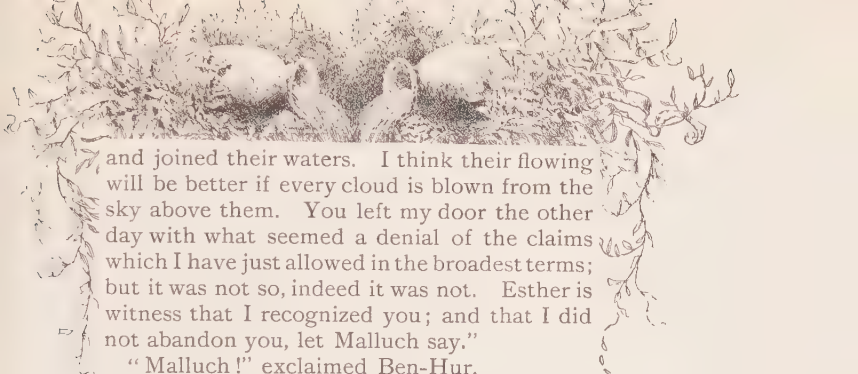
SIMONIDES looked up, none the less a master.

"Esther," he said, quietly, "the night is going fast; and, lest we become too weary for that which is before us, let the refreshments be brought."

She rang a bell. A servant answered with wine and bread, which she bore round.

"The understanding, good my master," continued Simonides, when all were served, "is not perfect in my sight. Henceforth our lives will run on together like rivers which have met





and joined their waters. I think their flowing will be better if every cloud is blown from the sky above them. You left my door the other day with what seemed a denial of the claims which I have just allowed in the broadest terms; but it was not so, indeed it was not. Esther is witness that I recognized you; and that I did not abandon you, let Malluch say."

"Malluch!" exclaimed Ben-Hur.

"One bound to a chair, like me, must have many hands far-reaching, if he would move the world from which he is so cruelly barred. I have many such, and Malluch is one of the best of them. And, sometimes"—he cast a grateful glance at the sheik—"sometimes I borrow from others good of heart, like Ilderim the Generous—good and brave. Let him say if I either denied or forgot you."

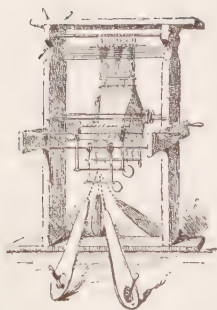
Ben-Hur looked at the Arab.

"This is he, good Ilderim, this is he who told you of me?"

Ilderim's eyes twinkled as he nodded his answer.

"How, O my master," said Simonides, "may we without trial tell what a man is? I knew you; I saw your father in you; but the kind of man you were I did not know. There are people to whom fortune is a curse in disguise. Were you of them? I sent Malluch to find out for me, and in the service he was my eyes and ears. Do not blame him. He brought me report of you which was all good."

"I do not," said Ben-Hur, heartily. "There was wisdom in your goodness."



"The words are very pleasant to me," said the merchant, with feeling, "very pleasant. My fear of misunderstanding is laid. Let the rivers run on now as God may give them direction."

After an interval he continued :

"I am compelled now by truth. The weaver sits weaving, and, as the shuttle flies, the cloth increases, and the figures grow, and he dreams dreams meanwhile ; so to my hands the fortune grew, and I wondered at the increase, and asked myself about it many times. I could see a care not my own went with the enterprises I set going. The simooms which smote others on the desert jumped over the things which were mine. The storms which heaped the sea-shore with wrecks did but blow my ships the sooner into port. Strangest of all, I, so dependent upon others, fixed to a place like a dead thing, had never a loss by an agent—never. The elements stooped to serve me, and all my servants, in fact, were faithful."

"It is very strange," said Ben-Hur.

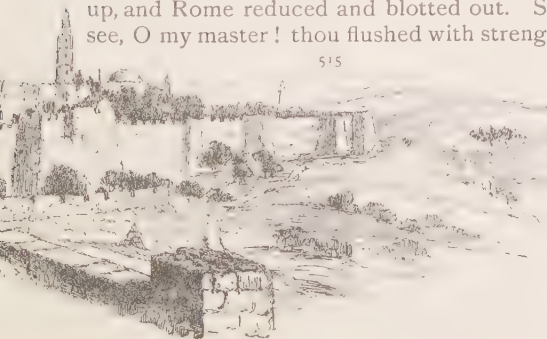
"So I said, and kept saying. Finally, O my master, finally I came to be of your opinion—God was in it—and, like you, I asked, What can his purpose be? Intelligence is never wasted ; intelligence like God's never stirs except with design. I have held the question in heart, lo ! these many years, watching for an answer. I felt sure, if God were in it, some day, in his own good time, in his own way, he would show me his purpose, making it clear as a whited house upon a hill. And I believe he has done so."

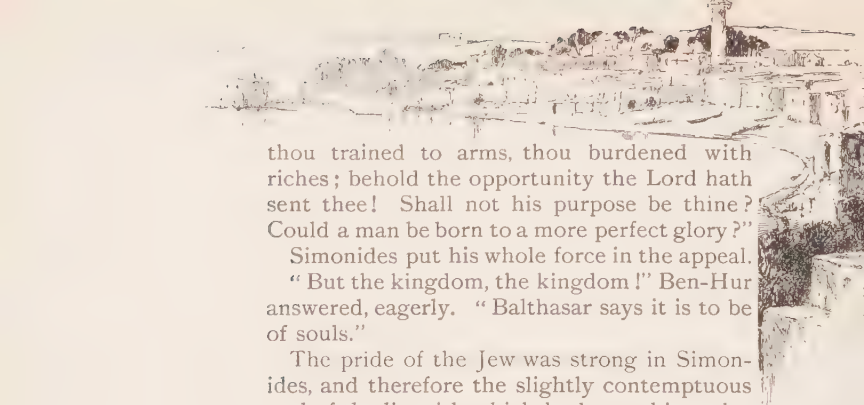
Ben-Hur listened with every faculty intent.

"Many years ago, with my people—thy mother was with me, Esther, beautiful as morning over old Olivet—I sat by the way-side out north of Jerusalem, near the Tombs of the Kings, when three men passed by riding great white camels, such as had never been seen in the Holy City. The men were strangers, and from far countries. The first one stopped and asked me a question. 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews?' As if to allay my wonder, he went on to say, 'We have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him.' I could not understand, but followed them to the Damascus Gate; and of every person they met on the way—of the guard at the Gate, even—they asked the question. All who heard it were amazed like me. In time I forgot the circumstance, though there was much talk of it as a presage of the Messiah. Alas, alas! What children we are, even the wisest! When God walks the earth, his steps are often centuries apart. You have seen Balthasar?"

"And heard him tell his story," said Ben-Hur.

"A miracle!—a very miracle!" cried Simonides. "As he told it to me, good my master, I seemed to hear the answer I had so long waited; God's purpose burst upon me. Poor will the King be when he comes—poor and friendless; without following, without armies, without cities or castles; a kingdom to be set up, and Rome reduced and blotted out. See, see, O my master! thou flushed with strength,





thou trained to arms, thou burdened with riches; behold the opportunity the Lord hath sent thee! Shall not his purpose be thine? Could a man be born to a more perfect glory?"

Simonides put his whole force in the appeal.

"But the kingdom, the kingdom!" Ben-Hur answered, eagerly. "Balthasar says it is to be of souls."

The pride of the Jew was strong in Simonides, and therefore the slightly contemptuous curl of the lip with which he began his reply:

"Balthasar has been a witness of wonderful things—of miracles, O my master; and when he speaks of them, I bow with belief, for they are of sight and sound personal to him. But he is a son of Mizraim, and not even a proselyte. Hardly may he be supposed to have special knowledge by virtue of which we must bow to him in a matter of God's dealing with our Israel. The prophets had their light from Heaven directly, even as he had his—many to one, and Jehovah the same forever. I must believe the prophets.—Bring me the Torah, Esther."

He proceeded without waiting for her.

"May the testimony of a whole people be slighted, my master? Though you travel from Tyre, which is by the sea in the north, to the capital of Edom, which is in the desert south, you will not find a lisper of the Shema, an alms-giver in the Temple, or any one who has ever eaten of the lamb of the Passover, to tell you the kingdom the King is coming to build for us, the children of the covenant, is other

than of this world, like our father David's. Now where got they the faith, ask you? We will see presently."

Esther here returned, bringing a number of rolls carefully enveloped in dark-brown linen lettered quaintly in gold.

"Keep them, daughter, to give to me as I call for them," the father said, in the tender voice he always used in speaking to her, and continued his argument:

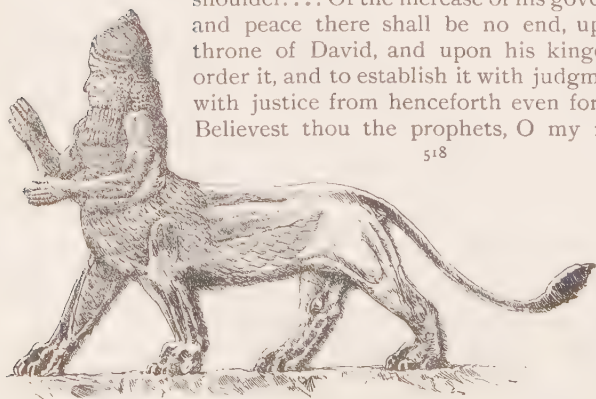
"It were long, good my master—too long, indeed—for me to repeat to you the names of the holy men who, in the providence of God, succeeded the prophets, only a little less favored than they—the seers who have written and the preachers who have taught since the Captivity; the very wise who borrowed their lights from the lamp of Malachi, the last of his line, and whose great names Hillel and Shammai never tired of repeating in the colleges. Will you ask them of the kingdom? Thus, the Lord of the sheep in the Book of Enoch—who is he? Who but the King of whom we are speaking? A throne is set up for him; he smites the earth, and the other kings are shaken from their thrones, and the scourges of Israel flung into a cavern of fire flaming with pillars of fire. So also the singer of the Psalms of Solomon—'Behold, O Lord, and raise up to Israel their king, the son of David, at the time thou knowest, O God, to rule Israel, thy children. . . . And he will bring the peoples of the heathen under his yoke to serve him. . . . And he shall be a righteous king taught of



God, . . . for he shall rule all the earth by the word of his mouth forever.' And last, though not least, hear Ezra, the second Moses, in his visions of the night, and ask him who is the lion with human voice that says to the eagle—which is Rome—'Thou hast loved liars, and overthrown the cities of the industrious, and razed their walls, though they did thee no harm. Therefore, begone, that the earth may be refreshed, and recover itself, and hope in the justice and piety of him who made her.' Whereat the eagle was seen no more. Surely, O my master, the testimony of these should be enough! but the way to the fountain's head is open. Let us go up to it at once.—Some wine, Esther, and then the Torah."

"Dost thou believe the prophets, master?" he asked, after drinking. "I know thou dost, for of such was the faith of all thy kindred.—Give me, Esther, the book which hath in it the visions of Isaiah."

He took one of the rolls which she had unwrapped for him, and read, "'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. . . . For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder. . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever.'—Believest thou the prophets, O my master?"





—Now, Esther, the word of the Lord that came to Micah."

She gave him the roll he asked.

"'But thou,'" he began reading — "'but thou, Bethlehem Ephrath, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.'" — This was he, the very child Balthasar saw and worshipped in the cave. Believest thou the prophets, O my master? — Give me, Esther, the words of Jeremiah."

Receiving that roll, he read as before, "'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely.'" As a king he shall reign — as a king, O my master! Believest thou the prophets? — Now, daughter, the roll of the sayings of that son of Judah in whom there was no blemish."

She gave him the book of Daniel.

"Hear, my master," he said: "'I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven. . . . And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.'" — Believest thou the prophets, O my master?"

"It is enough. I believe," cried Ben-Hur.

"What then?" asked Simonides. "If the

King come poor, will not my master, of his abundance, give him help?"

"Help him? To the last shekel and the last breath. But why speak of his coming poor?"

"Give me, Esther, the word of the Lord as it came to Zechariah," said Simonides.

She gave him one of the rolls.

"Hear how the King will enter Jerusalem."

Then he read, "' Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. . . . Behold, thy King cometh unto thee with justice and salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass.' "

Ben-Hur looked away.

"What see you, O my master?"

"Rome!" he answered, gloomily—"Rome, and her legions. I have dwelt with them in their camps. I know them."

"Ah!" said Simonides. "Thou shalt be a master of legions for the King, with millions to choose from."

"Millions!" cried Ben-Hur.

Simonides sat a moment thinking.

"The question of power should not trouble you," he next said.

Ben-Hur looked at him inquiringly.

"You were seeing the lowly King in the act of coming to his own," Simonides answered—"seeing him on the right hand, as it were, and on the left the brassy legions of Cæsar, and you were asking, What can he do?"

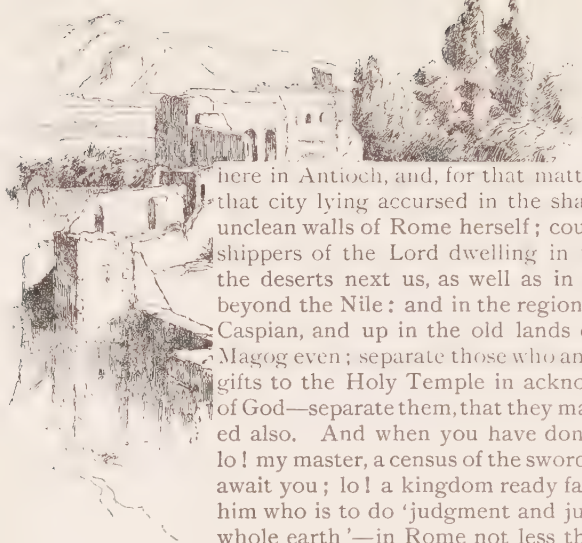
"It was my very thought."

"O my master!" Simonides continued. "You do not know how strong our Israel is. You



think of him as a sorrowful old man weeping by the rivers of Babylon. But go up to Jerusalem next Passover, and stand on the Xystus or in the Street of Barter, and see him as he is. The promise of the Lord to father Jacob coming out of Padan-Aram was a law under which our people have not ceased multiplying—not even in captivity; they grew under foot of the Egyptian; the clench of the Roman has been but wholesome nurture to them; now they are indeed ‘a nation, and a company of nations.’ Nor that only, my master; in fact, to measure the strength of Israel—which is, in fact, measuring what the King can do—you shall not bide solely by the rule of natural increase, but add thereto the other—I mean the spread of the faith, which will carry you to the far and near of the whole known earth. Further, the habit is, I know, to think and speak of Jerusalem as Israel, which may be likened to our finding an embroidered shred, and holding it up as a magisterial robe of Cæsar’s. Jerusalem is but a stone of the Temple, or the heart in the body. Turn from beholding the legions, strong though they be, and count the hosts of the faithful waiting the old alarm, ‘To your tents, O Israel!’—count the many in Persia, children of those who chose not to return with the returning; count the brethren who swarm the marts of Egypt and Farther Africa; count the Hebrew colonists eking profit in the West—in Lodinum and the trade-courts of Spain; count the pure of blood and the proselytes in Greece and in the isles of the sea, and over in Pontus, and





here in Antioch, and, for that matter, those of that city lying accursed in the shadow of the unclean walls of Rome herself; count the worshippers of the Lord dwelling in tents along the deserts next us, as well as in the deserts beyond the Nile; and in the regions across the Caspian, and up in the old lands of Gog and Magog even; separate those who annually send gifts to the Holy Temple in acknowledgment of God—separate them, that they may be counted also. And when you have done counting, lo! my master, a census of the sword hands that await you; lo! a kingdom ready fashioned for him who is to do 'judgment and justice in the whole earth'—in Rome not less than in Zion. Have then the answer, What Israel can do, that can the King."

The picture was fervently given.

Upon Ilderim it operated like the blowing of a trumpet. "Oh that I had back my youth!" he cried, starting to his feet.

Ben-Hur sat still. The speech, he saw, was an invitation to devote his life and fortune to the mysterious Being who was palpably as much the centre of a great hope with Simonides as with the devout Egyptian. The idea, as we have seen, was not a new one, but had come to him repeatedly; once while listening to Mal-luch in the Grove of Daphne; afterwards more distinctly while Balthasar was giving his conception of what the kingdom was to be; still later, in the walk through the old Orchard, it had risen almost, if not quite, into a resolve. At such times it had come and gone only an idea,

attended with feelings more or less acute. Not so now. A master had it in charge, a master was working it up; already he had exalted it into a cause brilliant with possibilities and infinitely holy. The effect was as if a door theretofore unseen had suddenly opened flooding Ben-Hur with light, and admitting him to a service which had been his one perfect dream—a service reaching far into the future, and rich with the rewards of duty done, and prizes to sweeten and soothe his ambition. One touch more was needed.

"Let us concede all you say, O Simonides," said Ben-Hur—"that the King will come, and his kingdom be as Solomon's; say also I am ready to give myself and all I have to him and his cause; yet more, say that I should do as was God's purpose in the ordering of my life and in your quick amassment of astonishing fortune; then what? Shall we proceed like blind men building? Shall we wait till the King comes? Or until he sends for me? You have age and experience on your side. Answer."

Simonides answered at once.

"We have no choice; none. This letter"—he produced Messala's despatch as he spoke—"this letter is the signal for action. The alliance proposed between Messala and Gratus we are not strong enough to resist; we have not the influence at Rome nor the force here. They will kill you if we wait. How merciful they are, look at me and judge."

He shuddered at the terrible recollection.

"O good my master," he continued, recover-



ing himself ; " how strong are you—in purpose, I mean ?"

Ben-Hur did not understand him.

" I remember how pleasant the world was to me in my youth," Simonides proceeded.

" Yet," said Ben-Hur, " you were capable of a great sacrifice."

" Yes ; for love."

" Has not life other motives as strong ?"

Simonides shook his head.

" There is ambition."

" Ambition is forbidden a son of Israel."

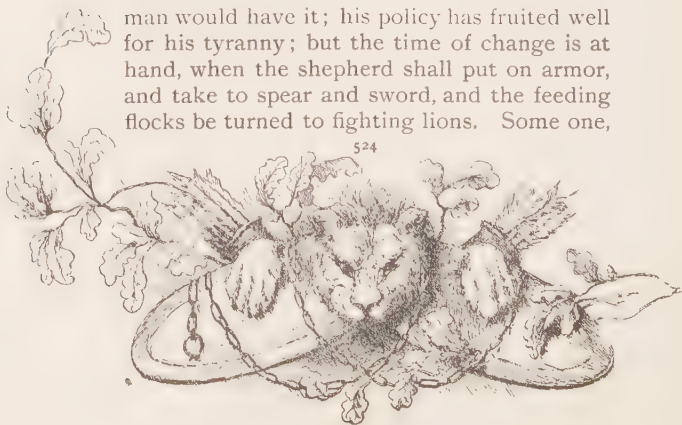
" What, then, of revenge ?"

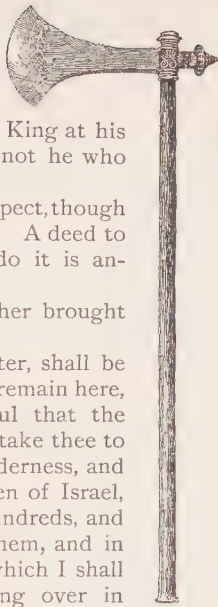
The spark dropped upon the inflammable passion ; the man's eyes gleamed ; his hands shook ; he answered, quickly, " Revenge is a Jew's of right ; it is the law."

" A camel, even a dog, will remember a wrong," cried Ilderim.

Directly Simonides picked up the broken thread of his thought.

" There is a work, a work for the King, which should be done in advance of his coming. We may not doubt that Israel is to be his right hand ; but, alas ! it is a hand of peace, without cunning in war. Of the millions, there is not one trained band, not a captain. The mercenaries of the Herods I do not count, for they are kept to crush us. The condition is as the Roman would have it ; his policy has fruited well for his tyranny ; but the time of change is at hand, when the shepherd shall put on armor, and take to spear and sword, and the feeding flocks be turned to fighting lions. Some one,





my son, must have place next the King at his right hand. Who shall it be if not he who does this work well?"

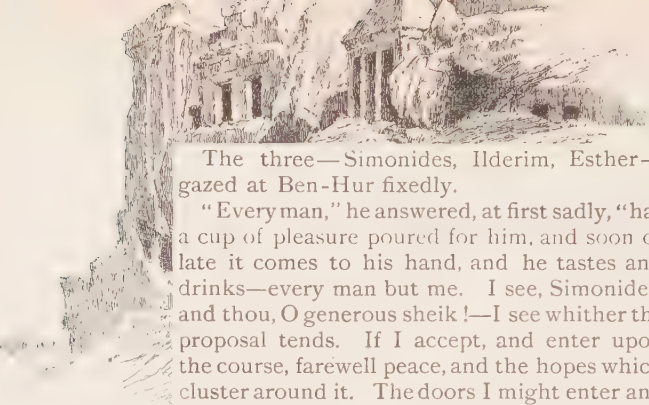
Ben-Hur's face flushed at the prospect, though he said, "I see; but speak plainly. A deed to be done is one thing; how to do it is another."

Simonides sipped the wine Esther brought him, and replied,

"The sheik, and thou, my master, shall be principals, each with a part. I will remain here, carrying on as now, and watchful that the spring go not dry. Thou shalt betake thee to Jerusalem, and thence to the wilderness, and begin numbering the fighting-men of Israel, and telling them into tens and hundreds, and choosing captains and training them, and in secret places hoarding arms, for which I shall keep thee supplied. Commencing over in Perea, thou shalt go then to Galilee, whence it is but a step to Jerusalem. In Perea, the desert will be at thy back, and Ilderim in reach of thy hand. He will keep the roads, so that nothing shall pass without thy knowledge. He will help thee in many ways. Until the ripening time no one shall know what is here contracted. Mine is but a servant's part. I have spoken to Ilderim. What sayest thou?"

Ben-Hur looked at the sheik.

"It is as he says, son of Hur," the Arab responded. "I have given my word, and he is content with it; but thou shalt have my oath, binding me, and the ready hands of my tribe, and whatever serviceable thing I have."



The three—Simonides, Ilderim, Esther—gazed at Ben-Hur fixedly.

"Every man," he answered, at first sadly, "has a cup of pleasure poured for him, and soon or late it comes to his hand, and he tastes and drinks—every man but me. I see, Simonides, and thou, O generous sheik!—I see whither the proposal tends. If I accept, and enter upon the course, farewell peace, and the hopes which cluster around it. The doors I might enter and the gates of quiet life shut behind me, never to open again, for Rome keeps them all; and her outlawry will follow me, and her hunters; and in the tombs near cities and the dismal caverns of remotest hills, I must eat my crust and take my rest."

The speech was broken by a sob. All turned to Esther, who hid her face upon her father's shoulder.

"I did not think of you, Esther," said Simonides, gently, for he was himself deeply moved.

"It is well enough, Simonides," said Ben-Hur. "A man bears a hard doom better, knowing there is pity for him. Let me go on."

They gave him ear again.

"I was about to say," he continued, "I have no choice, but take the part you assign me; and as remaining here is to meet an ignoble death, I will to the work at once."

"Shall we have writings?" asked Simonides, moved by his habit of business.

"I rest upon your word," said Ben-Hur.

"And I," Ilderim answered.

Thus simply was effected the treaty which

was to alter Ben-Hur's life. And almost immediately the latter added,

"It is done, then."

"May the God of Abraham help us!" Simonides exclaimed.

"One word now, my friends," Ben-Hur said, more cheerfully. "By your leave, I will be my own until after the games. It is not probable Messala will set peril on foot for me until he has given the procurator time to answer him, and that cannot be in less than seven days from the despatch of his letter. The meeting him in the Circus is a pleasure I would buy at whatever risk."

Ilderim, well pleased, assented readily, and Simonides, intent on business, added, "It is well; for look you, my master, the delay will give me time to do you a good part. I understood you to speak of an inheritance derived from Arrius. Is it in property?"

"A villa near Misenum, and houses in Rome."

"I suggest, then, the sale of the property, and safe deposit of the proceeds. Give me an account of it, and I will have authorities drawn, and despatch an agent on the mission forthwith. We will forestall the imperial robbers at least this once."

"You shall have the account to-morrow."

"Then, if there be nothing more, the work of the night is done," said Simonides.

Ilderim combed his beard complacently, saying, "And well done."

"The bread and wine again, Esther. Sheik



Ilderim will make us happy by staying with us till to-morrow, or at his pleasure; and thou, my master—”

“Let the horses be brought,” said Ben-Hur. “I will return to the Orchard. The enemy will not discover me if I go now, and”—he glanced at Ilderim—“the four will be glad to see me.”

As the day dawned, he and Malluch dismounted at the door of the tent.

CHAPTER IX ESTHER AND BEN-HUR

NEXT night, about the fourth hour, Ben-Hur stood on the terrace of the great warehouse with Esther. Below them, on the landing, there was much running about, and shifting of packages and boxes, and shouting of men, whose figures, stooping, heaving, hauling, looked, in the light of the crackling torches kindled in their aid, like the laboring genii of the fantastic Eastern tales. A galley was being laden for instant departure. Simonides had not yet come from his office, in which, at the last moment, he would deliver to the captain of the vessel instructions to proceed without stop to Ostia, the seaport of Rome, and, after landing a passenger there, continue more leisurely to Valentia, on the coast of Spain.

The passenger is the agent going to dispose of the estate derived from Arrius the duumvir.



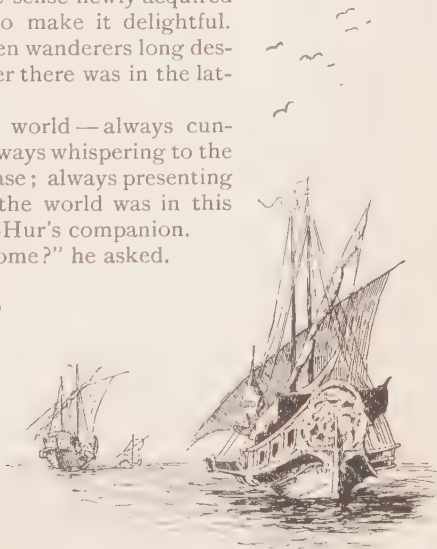
When the lines of the vessel are cast off, and she is put about, and her voyage begun, Ben-Hur will be committed irrevocably to the work undertaken the night before. If he is disposed to repent the agreement with Ilderim, a little time is allowed him to give notice and break it off. He is master, and has only to say the word.

Such may have been the thought at the moment in his mind. He was standing with folded arms, looking upon the scene in the manner of a man debating with himself. Young, handsome, rich, but recently from the patrician circles of Roman society, it is easy to think of the world besetting him with appeals not to give more to onerous duty or ambition attended with outlawry and danger. We can even imagine the arguments with which he was pressed; the hopelessness of contention with Cæsar, the uncertainty veiling everything connected with the King and his coming; the ease, honors, state, purchasable like goods in market, and, strongest of all, the sense newly acquired of home, with friends to make it delightful. Only those who have been wanderers long desolate can know the power there was in the latter appeal.

Let us add now, the world—always cunning enough of itself; always whispering to the weak, Stay, take thine ease; always presenting the sunny side of life—the world was in this instance helped by Ben-Hur's companion.

"Were you ever at Rome?" he asked.

"No," Esther replied.



"Would you like to go?"

"I think not."

"Why?"

"I am afraid of Rome," she answered, with a perceptible tremor of the voice.

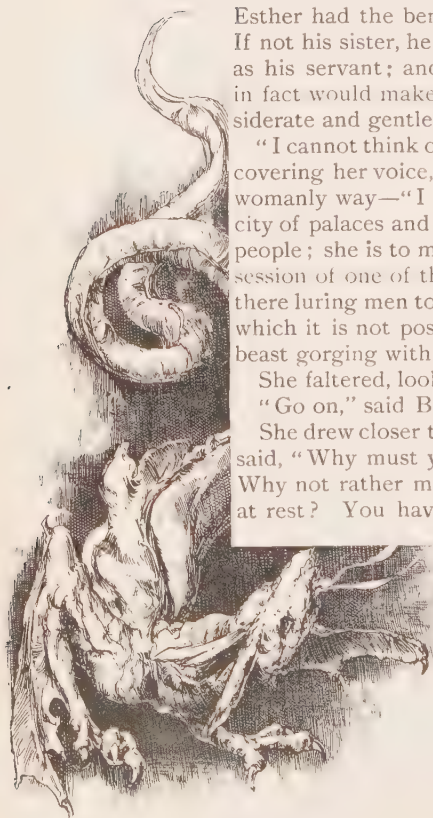
He looked at her then—or rather down upon her, for at his side she appeared little more than a child. In the dim light he could not see her face distinctly; even the form was shadowy. But again he was reminded of Tirzah, and a sudden tenderness fell upon him—just so the lost sister stood with him on the housetop the calamitous morning of the accident to Gratus. Poor Tirzah! Where was she now? Esther had the benefit of the feeling evoked. If not his sister, he could never look upon her as his servant; and that she was his servant in fact would make him always the more considerate and gentle towards her.

"I cannot think of Rome," she continued, recovering her voice, and speaking in her quiet, womanly way—"I cannot think of Rome as a city of palaces and temples, and crowded with people; she is to me a monster which has possession of one of the beautiful lands, and lies there luring men to ruin and death—a monster which it is not possible to resist—a ravenous beast gorging with blood. Why—"

She faltered, looked down, stopped.

"Go on," said Ben-Hur, reassuringly.

She drew closer to him, looked up again, and said, "Why must you make her your enemy? Why not rather make peace with her, and be at rest? You have had many ills and borne



them; you have survived the snares laid for you by foes. Sorrow has consumed your youth, is it well to give it the remainder of your days?"

The girlish face under his eyes seemed to come nearer and get whiter as the pleading went on; he stooped towards it, and asked, softly, "What would you have me do, Esther?"

She hesitated a moment, then asked, in return, "Is the property near Rome a residence?"

"Yes."

"And pretty?"

"It is beautiful—a palace in the midst of gardens and shell-strewn walks; fountains without and within; statuary in the shady nooks, hills around covered with vines, and so high that Neapolis and Vesuvius are in sight, and the sea an expanse of purpling blue dotted with restless sails. Cæsar has a country-seat near by, but in Rome they say the old Arrian villa is the prettiest."

"And the life there, is it quiet?"

"There was never a summer day, never a moonlit night, more quiet, save when visitors come. Now that the old owner is gone, and I am here, there is nothing to break its silence—nothing, unless it be the whispering of servants, or the whistling of happy birds, or the noise of fountains at play; it is changeless, except as day by day old flowers fade and fall, and new ones bud and bloom, and the sunlight gives place to the shadow of a passing cloud. The life, Esther, was all too quiet for me. It made me restless by keeping always present a feeling



that I, who have so much to do, was dropping into idle habits, and tying myself with silken chains, and after a while—and not a long while either—would end with nothing done.”

She looked off over the river.

“Why did you ask?” he said.

“Good my master—”

“No, no, Esther—not that. Call me friend—brother, if you will ; I am not your master, and will not be. Call me brother.”

He could not see the flush of pleasure which reddened her face, and the glow of the eyes that went out lost in the void above the river.

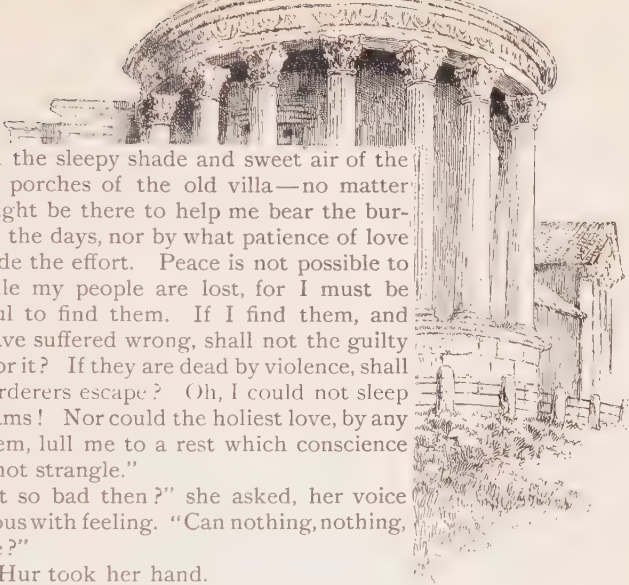
“I cannot understand,” she said, “the nature which prefers the life you are going to—a life—”

“Of violence, and it may be of blood,” he said, completing the sentence.

“Yes,” she added, “the nature which could prefer that life to such as might be in the beautiful villa.”

“Esther, you mistake. There is no preference. Alas ! the Roman is not so kind. I am going of necessity. To stay here is to die ; and if I go there, the end will be the same—a poisoned cup, a bravo’s blow, or a judge’s sentence obtained by perjury. Messala and the procurator Gratus are rich with plunder of my father’s estate, and it is more important to them to keep their gains now than was their getting in the first instance. A peaceable settlement is out of reach, because of the confession it would imply. And then—then— Ah, Esther, if I could buy them, I do not know that I would. I do not believe peace possible to me ; no, not





even in the sleepy shade and sweet air of the marble porches of the old villa—no matter who might be there to help me bear the burdens of the days, nor by what patience of love she made the effort. Peace is not possible to me while my people are lost, for I must be watchful to find them. If I find them, and they have suffered wrong, shall not the guilty suffer for it? If they are dead by violence, shall the murderers escape? Oh, I could not sleep for dreams! Nor could the holiest love, by any stratagem, lull me to a rest which conscience would not strangle."

"Is it so bad then?" she asked, her voice tremulous with feeling. "Can nothing, nothing, be done?"

Ben-Hur took her hand.

"Do you care so much for me?"

"Yes," she answered, simply.

The hand was warm, and in the palm of his it was lost. He felt it tremble. Then the Egyptian came, so the opposite of this little one; so tall, so audacious, with a flattery so cunning, a wit so ready, a beauty so wonderful, a manner so bewitching. He carried the hand to his lips and gave it back.

"You shall be another Tirzah to me, Esther."

"Who is Tirzah?"

"The little sister the Roman stole from me, and whom I must find before I can rest or be happy."

Just then a gleam of light flashed athwart the terrace and fell upon the two; and, looking round, they saw a servant roll Simonides

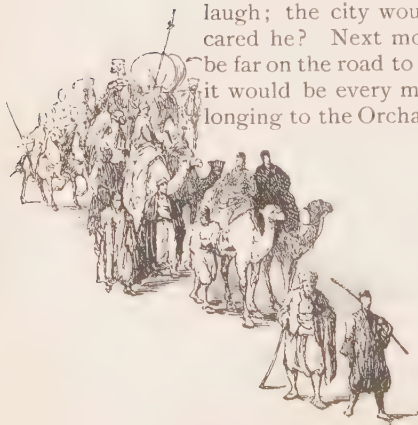
in his chair out of the door. They went to the merchant, and in the after-talk he was principal.

Immediately the lines of the galley were cast off, and she swung round, and, midst the flashing of torches and the shouting of joyous sailors, hurried off to the sea—leaving Ben-Hur committed to the cause of the KING WHO WAS TO COME.

CHAPTER X

POSTED FOR THE RACE

THE day before the games, in the afternoon, all Ilderim's racing property was taken to the city, and put in quarters adjoining the Circus. Along with it the good man carried a great deal of property not of that class; so with servants, retainers mounted and armed, horses in leading, cattle driven, camels laden with baggage, his outgoing from the Orchard was not unlike a tribal migration. The people along the road failed not to laugh at his motley procession; on the other side, it was observed that, with all his irascibility, he was not in the least offended by their rudeness. If he was under surveillance, as he had reason to believe, the informer would describe the semi-barbarous show with which he came up to the races. The Romans would laugh; the city would be amused; but what cared he? Next morning the pageant would be far on the road to the desert, and going with it would be every movable thing of value belonging to the Orchard—everything save such



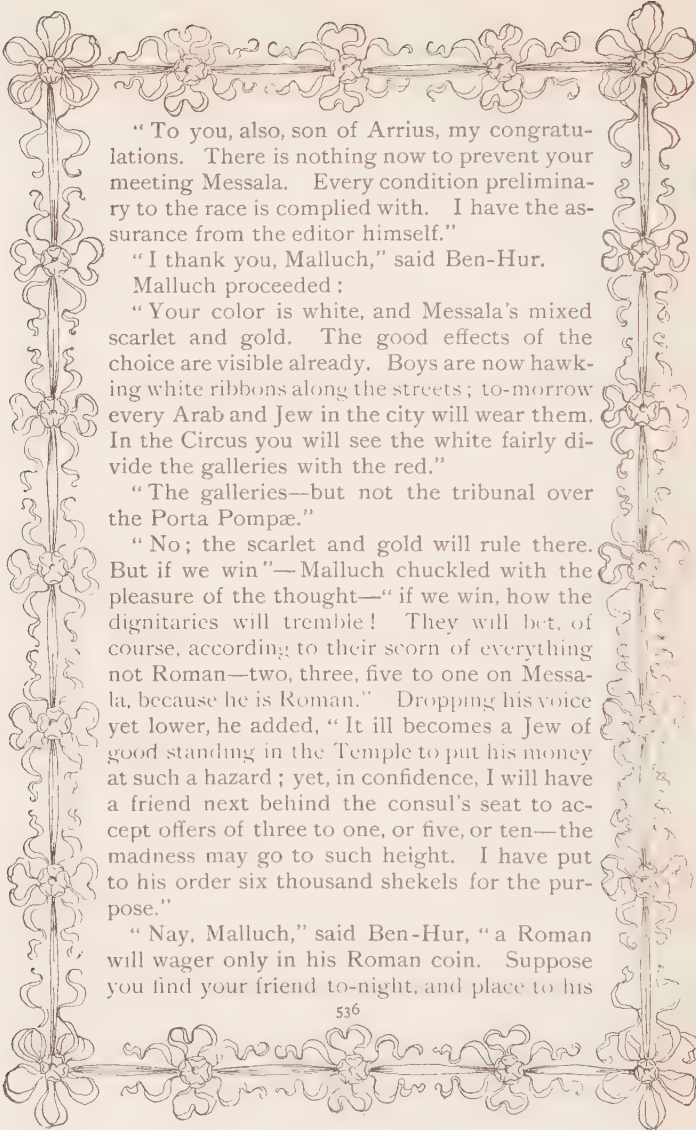


as were essential to the success of his four. He was, in fact, started home; his tents were all folded; the dower was no more; in twelve hours all would be out of reach, pursue who might. A man is never safer than when he is under the laugh; and the shrewd old Arab knew it.

Neither he nor Ben-Hur overestimated the influence of Messala; it was their opinion, however, that he would not begin active measures against them until after the meeting in the Circus; if defeated there, especially if defeated by Ben-Hur, they might instantly look for the worst he could do; he might not even wait for advices from Gratus. With this view, they shaped their course, and were prepared to betake themselves out of harm's way. They rode together now in good spirits, calmly confident of success on the morrow.

On the way, they came upon Malluch in waiting for them. The faithful fellow gave no sign by which it was possible to infer any knowledge on his part of the relationship so recently admitted between Ben-Hur and Simonides, or of the treaty between them and Ilderim. He exchanged salutations as usual, and produced a paper, saying to the sheik, "I have here the notice of the editor of the games, just issued, in which you will find your horses published for the race. You will find in it also the order of exercises. Without waiting, good sheik, I congratulate you upon your victory."

He gave the paper over, and, leaving the worthy to master it, turned to Ben-Hur.

A decorative border with a repeating floral motif, featuring stylized flowers and scrolling vines, framing the text on all four sides.

"To you, also, son of Arrius, my congratulations. There is nothing now to prevent your meeting Messala. Every condition preliminary to the race is complied with. I have the assurance from the editor himself."

"I thank you, Malluch," said Ben-Hur.

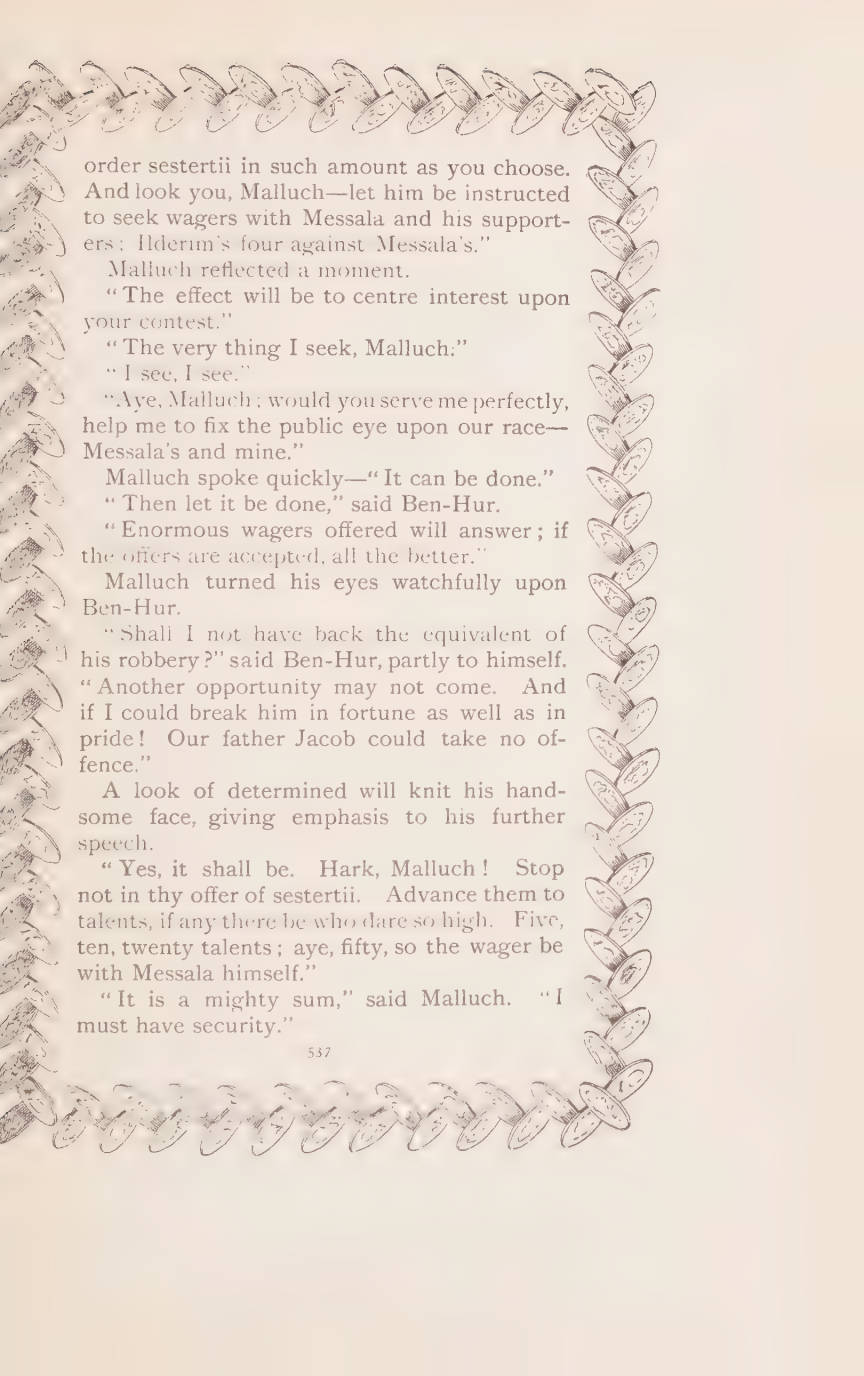
Malluch proceeded :

"Your color is white, and Messala's mixed scarlet and gold. The good effects of the choice are visible already. Boys are now hawking white ribbons along the streets ; to-morrow every Arab and Jew in the city will wear them. In the Circus you will see the white fairly divide the galleries with the red."

"The galleries—but not the tribunal over the Porta Pompæ."

"No ; the scarlet and gold will rule there. But if we win"—Malluch chuckled with the pleasure of the thought—"if we win, how the dignitaries will tremble ! They will bet, of course, according to their scorn of everything not Roman—two, three, five to one on Messala, because he is Roman." Dropping his voice yet lower, he added, "It ill becomes a Jew of good standing in the Temple to put his money at such a hazard ; yet, in confidence, I will have a friend next behind the consul's seat to accept offers of three to one, or five, or ten—the madness may go to such height. I have put to his order six thousand shekels for the purpose."

"Nay, Malluch," said Ben-Hur, "a Roman will wager only in his Roman coin. Suppose you find your friend to-night, and place to his



order sestertii in such amount as you choose. And look you, Malluch—let him be instructed to seek wagers with Messala and his supporters: Ilderim's four against Messala's."

Malluch reflected a moment.

"The effect will be to centre interest upon your contest."

"The very thing I seek, Malluch:"

"I see, I see."

"Aye, Malluch: would you serve me perfectly, help me to fix the public eye upon our race—Messala's and mine."

Malluch spoke quickly—"It can be done."

"Then let it be done," said Ben-Hur.

"Enormous wagers offered will answer; if the offers are accepted, all the better."

Malluch turned his eyes watchfully upon Ben-Hur.

"Shall I not have back the equivalent of his robbery?" said Ben-Hur, partly to himself. "Another opportunity may not come. And if I could break him in fortune as well as in pride! Our father Jacob could take no offence."

A look of determined will knit his handsome face, giving emphasis to his further speech.

"Yes, it shall be. Hark, Malluch! Stop not in thy offer of sestertii. Advance them to talents, if any there be who dare so high. Five, ten, twenty talents; aye, fifty, so the wager be with Messala himself."

"It is a mighty sum," said Malluch. "I must have security."



"So thou shalt. Go to Simonides, and tell him I wish the matter arranged. Tell him my heart is set on the ruin of my enemy, and that the opportunity hath such excellent promise that I choose such hazards. On our side be the God of our fathers. Go, good Malluch. Let this not slip."

And Malluch, greatly delighted, gave him parting salutation, and started to ride away, but returned presently.

"Your pardon," he said to Ben-Hur. "There was another matter. I could not get near Mes-sala's chariot myself, but I had another measure it; and, from his report, its hub stands quite a palm higher from the ground than yours."

"A palm! So much?" cried Ben-Hur, joyfully.

Then he leaned over to Malluch.

"As thou art a son of Judah, Malluch, and faithful to thy kin, get thee a seat in the gallery over the Gate of Triumph down close to the balcony in front of the pillars, and watch well when we make the turns there; watch well, for if I have favor at all, I will— Nay, Malluch, let it go unsaid! Only get thee there, and watch well."

At that moment a cry burst from Ilderim.

"Ha! By the splendor of God! what is this?"

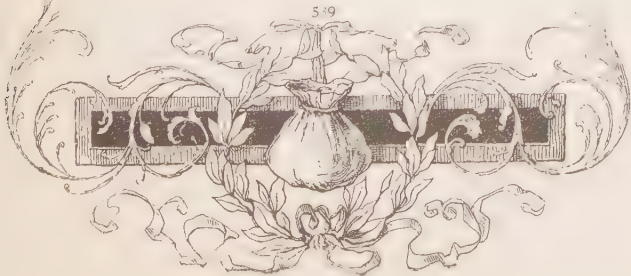
He drew near Ben-Hur with a finger pointing on the face of the notice.

"Read," said Ben-Hur.

"No; better thou."

Ben-Hur took the paper, which, signed by the prefect of the province as editor, performed the office of a modern programme, giving particularly the several divertisements provided for the occasion. It informed the public that there would be first a procession of extraordinary splendor; that the procession would be succeeded by the customary honors to the god Consus, whereupon the games would begin; running, leaping, wrestling, boxing, each in the order stated. The names of the competitors were given, with their several nationalities and schools of training, the trials in which they had been engaged, the prizes won, and the prizes now offered; under the latter head the sums of money were stated in illuminated letters, telling of the departure of the day when the simple chaplet of pine or laurel was fully enough for the victor, hungering for glory as something better than riches, and content with it.

Over these parts of the programme Ben-Hur sped with rapid eyes. At last he came to the announcement of the race. He read it slowly. Attending lovers of the heroic sports were assured they would certainly be gratified by an Orestean struggle unparalleled in Antioch. The city offered the spectacle in honor of the consul. One hundred thousand sestertii and a crown of laurel were the prizes. Then followed the particulars. The entries were six in all—fours only permitted; and, to further interest in the performance, the competitors would be turned into the course together. Each four then received description.



"I. A four of Lysippus the Corinthian—two grays, a bay, and a black; entered at Alexandria last year, and again at Corinth, where they were winners. Lysippus, driver. Color, yellow.

"II. A four of Messala of Rome—two white, two black; victors of the Circensian as exhibited in the Circus Maximus last year. Messala, driver. Colors, scarlet and gold.

"III. A four of Cleanthes the Athenian—three gray, one bay; winners at the Isthmian last year. Cleanthes, driver. Color, green.

"IV. A four of Dicæus the Byzantine—two black, one gray, one bay; winners this year at Byzantium. Dicæus, driver. Color, black.

"V. A four of Admetus the Sidonian—all grays. Thrice entered at Cæsarea, and thrice victors. Admetus, driver. Color, blue.

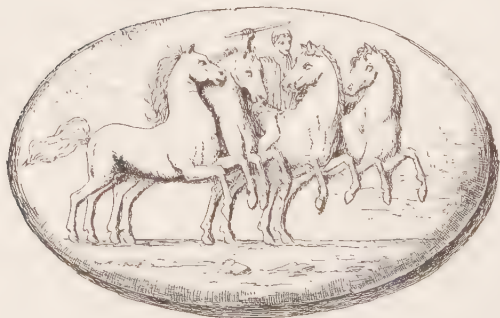
"VI. A four of Ilderim, sheik of the Desert. All bays; first race. Ben-Hur, a Jew, driver. Color white."

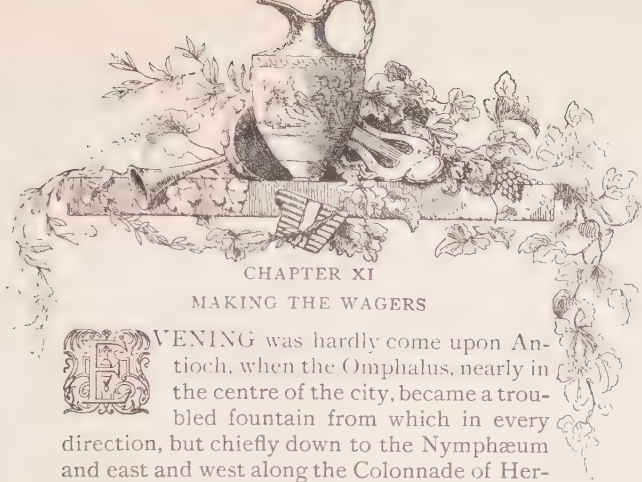
Ben-Hur, a Jew, driver!

Why that name instead of Arrius?

Ben-Hur raised his eyes to Ilderim. He had found the cause of the Arab's outcry. Both rushed to the same conclusion.

The hand was the hand of Messala!





CHAPTER XI

MAKING THE WAGERS

EVENING was hardly come upon Antioch, when the Omphalus, nearly in the centre of the city, became a troubled fountain from which in every direction, but chiefly down to the Nymphæum and east and west along the Colonnade of Herod, flowed currents of people, for the time given up to Bacchus and Apollo.

For such indulgence anything more fitting cannot be imagined than the great roofed streets, which were literally miles on miles of porticos wrought of marble, polished to the last degree of finish, and all gifts to the voluptuous city by princes careless of expenditure where, as in this instance, they thought they were eternizing themselves. Darkness was not permitted anywhere; and the singing, the laughter, the shouting, were incessant, and in compound like the roar of waters dashing through hollow grotts, confused by a multitude of echoes.

The many nationalities represented, though they might have amazed a stranger, were not peculiar to Antioch. Of the various missions of the great empire, one seems to have been the fusion of men and the introduction of strangers to each other; accordingly, whole peoples rose up and went at pleasure, taking with them their costumes, customs, speech, and gods; and

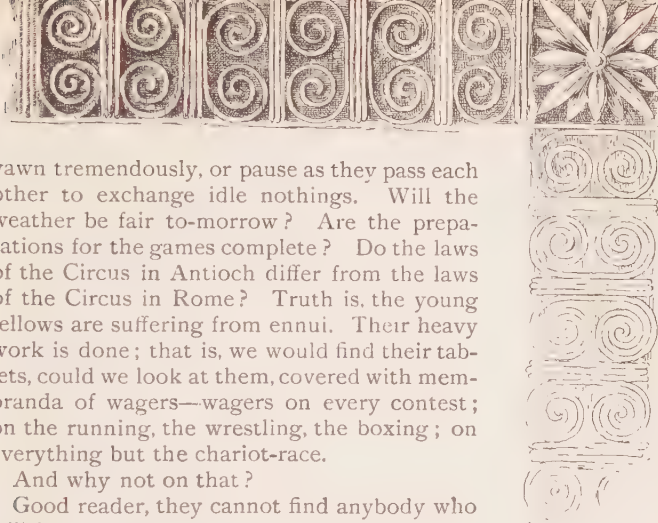
where they chose, they stopped, engaged in business, built houses, erected altars, and were what they had been at home.

There was a peculiarity, however, which could not have failed the notice of a looker-on this night in Antioch. Nearly everybody wore the colors of one or other of the charioteers announced for the morrow's race. Sometimes it was in form of a scarf, sometimes a badge; often a ribbon or a feather. Whatever the form, it signified merely the wearer's partiality; thus, green published a friend of Cleanthes the Athenian, and black an adherent of the Byzantine. This was according to a custom, old probably as the day of the race of Orestes—a custom, by the way, worthy of study as a marvel of history, illustrative of the absurd yet appalling extremities to which men frequently suffer their follies to drag them.

The observer abroad on this occasion, once attracted to the wearing of colors, would have very shortly decided that there were three in predominance—green, white, and the mixed scarlet and gold.

But let us from the streets to the palace on the island.

The five great chandeliers in the saloon are freshly lighted. The assemblage is much the same as that already noticed in connection with the place. The divan has its corps of sleepers and burden of garments, and the tables yet resound with the rattle and clash of dice. Yet the greater part of the company are not doing anything. They walk about, or



yawn tremendously, or pause as they pass each other to exchange idle nothings. Will the weather be fair to-morrow? Are the preparations for the games complete? Do the laws of the Circus in Antioch differ from the laws of the Circus in Rome? Truth is, the young fellows are suffering from ennui. Their heavy work is done; that is, we would find their tablets, could we look at them, covered with memoranda of wagers—wagers on every contest; on the running, the wrestling, the boxing; on everything but the chariot-race.

And why not on that?

Good reader, they cannot find anybody who will hazard so much as a denarius with them against Messala.

There are no colors in the saloon but his.

No one thinks of his defeat.

Why, they say, is he not perfect in his training? Did he not graduate from an imperial lanista? Were not his horses winners at the Circensian in the Circus Maximus? And then—ah, yes! he is a Roman!

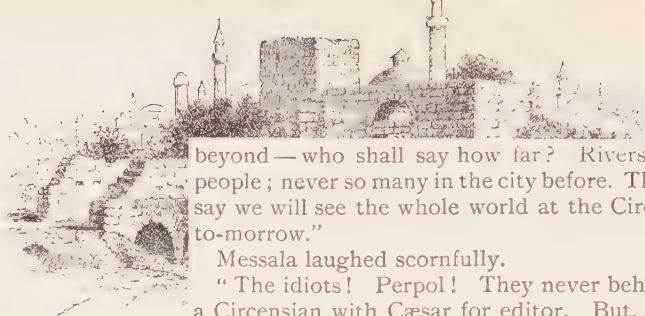
In a corner, at ease on the divan, Messala himself may be seen. Around him, sitting or standing, are his courtierly admirers, plying him with questions. There is, of course, but one topic.

Enter Drusus and Cecilius.

"Ah!" cries the young prince, throwing himself on the divan at Messala's feet, "Ah, by Bacchus, I am tired!"

"Whither away?" asks Messala.

"Up the street; up to the Omphalus, and



beyond—who shall say how far? Rivers of people; never so many in the city before. They say we will see the whole world at the Circus to-morrow."

Messala laughed scornfully.

"The idiots! Perpol! They never beheld a Circensian with Cæsar for editor. But, my Drusus, what found you?"

"Nothing."

"O—ah! You forget," said Cecilius.

"What?" asked Drusus.

"The procession of whites."

"Mirabile!" cried Drusus, half rising. "We met a faction of whites, and they had a banner. But—ha, ha, ha!"

He fell back indolently.

"Cruel Drusus—not to go on," said Messala.

"Scum of the desert were they, my Messala, and garbage-eaters from the Jacob's Temple in Jerusalem. What had I to do with them?"

"Nay," said Cecilius, "Drusus is afraid of a laugh, but I am not, my Messala."

"Speak thou, then."

"Well, we stopped the faction, and—"

"Offered them a wager," said Drusus, relenting, and taking the word from the shadow's mouth. "And—ha, ha, ha!—one fellow with not enough skin on his face to make a worm for a carp stepped forth, and—ha, ha, ha!—said yes. I drew my tablets. 'Who is your man?' I asked. 'Ben-Hur, the Jew,' said he. Then I: 'What shall it be? How much?' He answered, 'A—a—' Excuse me, Messala. By

Jove's thunder, I cannot go on for laughter !
Ha, ha, ha !"

The listeners leaned forward.

Messala looked to Cecilius.

"A shekel," said the latter.

"A shekel! A shekel!"

A burst of scornful laughter ran fast upon the repetition.

"And what did Drusus?" asked Messala.

An outcry over about the door just then occasioned a rush to that quarter; and, as the noise there continued, and grew louder, even Cecilius betook himself off, pausing only to say, "The noble Drusus, my Messala, put up his tablets and—lost the shekel."

"A white! A white!"

"Let him come!"

"This way, this way!"

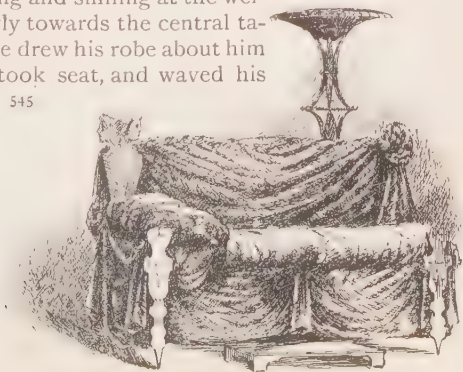
These and like exclamations filled the saloon, to the stoppage of other speech. The dice-players quit their games; the sleepers awoke, rubbed their eyes, drew their tablets, and hurried to the common centre.

"I offer you—"

"And I—"

"I—"

The person so warmly received was the respectable Jew, Ben-Hur's fellow-voyager from Cyprus. He entered grave, quiet, observant. His robe was spotlessly white; so was the cloth of his turban. Bowing and smiling at the welcome, he moved slowly towards the central table. Arrived there, he drew his robe about him in a stately manner, took seat, and waved his



hand. The gleam of a jewel on a finger helped him not a little to the silence which ensued.

"Romans—most noble Romans—I salute you!" he said.

"Easy, by Jupiter! Who is he?" asked Drusus.

"A dog of Israel—Sanballat by name—purveyor for the army; residence, Rome; vastly rich; grown so as a contractor of furnishings which he never furnishes. He spins mischiefs, nevertheless, finer than spiders spin their webs. Come—by the girdle of Venus! let us catch him!"

Messala arose as he spoke, and, with Drusus, joined the mass crowded about the purveyor.

"It came to me on the street," said that person, producing his tablets, and opening them on the table with an impressive air of business, "that there was great discomfort in the palace because offers on Messala were going without takers. The gods, you know, must have sacrifices; and here am I. You see my color; let us to the matter. Odds first, amounts next. What will you give me?"

The audacity seemed to stun his hearers.

"Haste!" he said. "I have an engagement with the consul."

The spur was effective.

"Two to one," cried half a dozen in a voice.

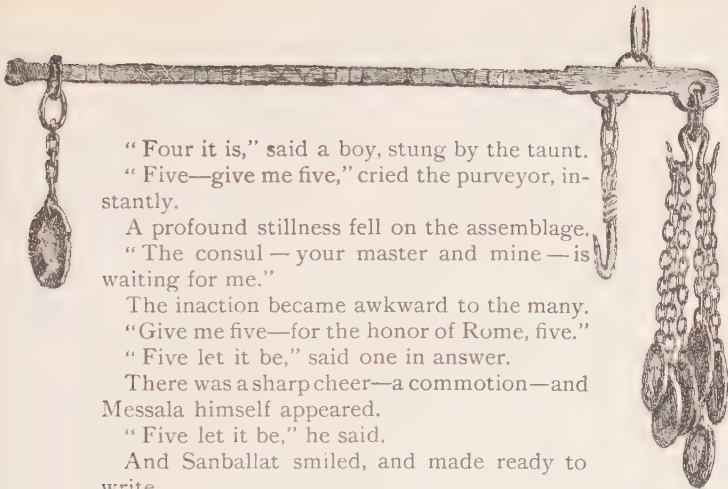
"What!" exclaimed the purveyor, astonished.

"Only two to one, and yours a Roman!"

"Take three, then."

"Three say you—only three—and mine but a dog of a Jew! Give me four."





"Four it is," said a boy, stung by the taunt.
"Five—give me five," cried the purveyor, instantly.

A profound stillness fell on the assemblage.
"The consul—your master and mine—is waiting for me."

The inaction became awkward to the many.

"Give me five—for the honor of Rome, five."

"Five let it be," said one in answer.

There was a sharp cheer—a commotion—and Messala himself appeared.

"Five let it be," he said.

And Sanballat smiled, and made ready to write.

"If Cæsar die to-morrow," he said, "Rome will not be all bereft. There is at least one other with spirit to take his place. Give me six."

"Six be it," answered Messala.

There was another shout louder than the first.

"Six be it," repeated Messala. "Six to one—the difference between a Roman and a Jew. And, having found it, now, O redeptor of the flesh of swine, let us on. The amount—and quickly. The consul may send for thee, and I will then be bereft."

Sanballat took the laugh against him coolly, and wrote, and offered the writing to Messala.

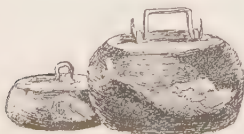
"Read, read!" everybody demanded.

And Messala read:

"MEM.—Chariot-race. Messala of Rome, in wager with Sanballat, also of Rome, says he will beat Ben-Hur, the Jew. Amount of wager, twenty talents. Odds to Sanballat, six to one.

"Witnesses:

SANBALLAT."



There was no noise, no motion. Each person seemed held in the pose the reading found him. Messala stared at the memorandum, while the eyes which had him in view opened wide, and stared at him. He felt the gaze, and thought rapidly. So lately he stood in the same place, and in the same way hectored the countrymen around him. They would remember it. If he refused to sign, his heroship was lost. And sign he could not; he was not worth one hundred talents, nor the fifth part of the sum. Suddenly his mind became a blank; he stood speechless; the color fled his face. An idea at last came to his relief.

"Thou Jew!" he said, "Where hast thou twenty talents? Show me."

Sanballat's provoking smile deepened.

"There," he replied, offering Messala a paper.

"Read, read!" arose all around.

Again Messala read:

"At ANTIOCH, Tammuz 16th day.

"The bearer, Sanballat of Rome, hath now to his order with me fifty talents, coin of Cæsar.

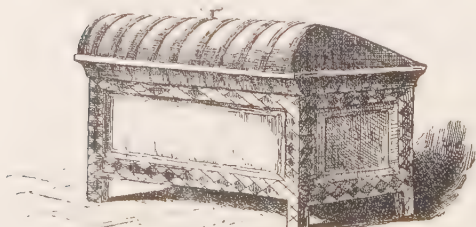
"SIMONIDES."

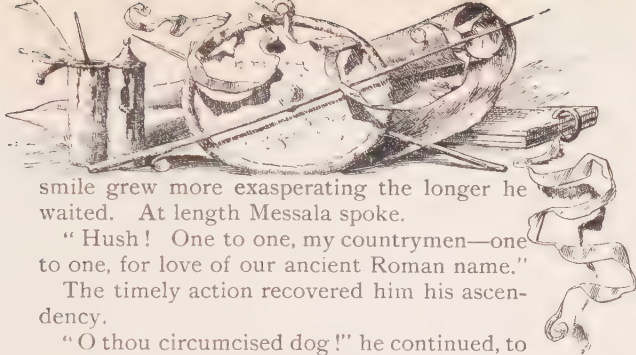
"Fifty talents, fifty talents!" echoed the throng, in amazement.

Then Drusus came to the rescue.

"By Hercules!" he shouted, "the paper lies, and the Jew is a liar. Who but Cæsar hath fifty talents at order? Down with the insolent white!"

The cry was angry, and it was angrily repeated; yet Sanballat kept his seat, and his





smile grew more exasperating the longer he waited. At length Messala spoke.

"Hush! One to one, my countrymen—one to one, for love of our ancient Roman name."

The timely action recovered him his ascendancy.

"O thou circumcised dog!" he continued, to Sanballat, "I gave thee six to one, did I not?"

"Yes," said the Jew, quietly.

"Well, give me now the fixing of the amount."

"With reserve, if the amount be trifling, have thy will," answered Sanballat.

"Write, then, five in place of twenty."

"Hast thou so much?"

"By the mother of the gods, I will show you receipts."

"Nay, the word of so brave a Roman must pass. Only make the sum even—six make it, and I will write."

"Write it so."

And forthwith they exchanged writings.

Sanballat immediately arose and looked around him, a sneer in place of his smile. No man better than he knew those with whom he was dealing.

"Romans," he said, "another wager, if you dare! Five talents against five talents that the white will win. I challenge you collectively."

They were again surprised.

"What!" he cried, louder. "Shall it be said in the Circus to-morrow that a dog of Israel went into the saloon of the palace full of Roman nobles—among them the scion of a Cæsar—and laid five talents before them in chal-

lenge, and they had not the courage to take it up?"

The sting was unendurable.

"Have done, O insolent!" said Drusus, "write the challenge, and leave it on the table; and to-morrow, if we find thou hast indeed so much money to put at such hopeless hazard, I, Drusus, promise it shall be taken."

Sanballat wrote again, and, rising, said, unmoved as ever, "See, Drusus, I leave the offer with you. When it is signed, send it to me any time before the race begins. I will be found with the consul in a seat over the Porta Pompæ. Peace to you; peace to all."

He bowed and departed, careless of the shout of derision with which they pursued him out of the door.

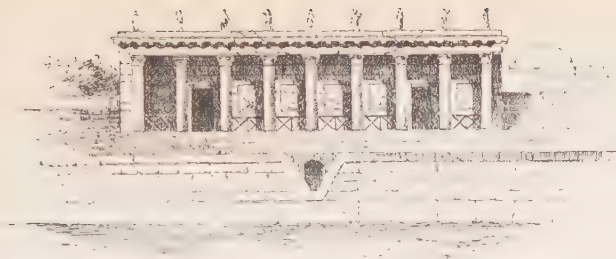
In the night the story of the prodigious wager flew along the streets and over the city; and Ben-Hur, lying with his four, was told of it, and also that Messala's whole fortune was on the hazard.

And he slept never so soundly.



TOMB OF LAZARUS





CHAPTER XII THE CIRCUS

THE Circus at Antioch stood on the south bank of the river nearly opposite the island, differing in no respect from the plan of such buildings in general.

In the purest sense, the games were a gift to the public ; consequently, everybody was free to attend ; and, vast as the holding capacity of the structure was, so fearful were the people, on this occasion, lest there should not be room for them, that, early the day before the opening of the exhibition, they took up all the vacant spaces in the vicinity, where their temporary shelter suggested an army in waiting.

At midnight the entrances were thrown wide, and the rabble, surging in, occupied the quarters assigned to them, from which nothing less than an earthquake or an army with spears could have dislodged them. They dozed the night away on the benches, and breakfasted there ; and there the close of the exercises found them, patient and sight-hungry as in the beginning.

The better people, their seats secured, began moving towards the Circus about the first hour of the morning, the noble and very rich among them distinguished by litters and retinues of liveried servants.



By the second hour, the efflux from the city was a stream unbroken and innumerable.

Exactly as the gnomon of the official dial up in the citadel pointed the second hour half gone, the legion, in full panoply, and with all its standards on exhibit, descended from Mount Sulpius; and when the rear of the last cohort disappeared in the bridge, Antioch was literally abandoned—not that the Circus could hold the multitude, but that the multitude was gone out to it, nevertheless.

A great concourse on the river shore witnessed the consul come over from the island in a barge of state. As the great man landed, and was received by the legion, the martial show for one brief moment transcended the attraction of the Circus.

At the third hour, the audience, if such it may be termed, was assembled; at last, a flourish of trumpets called for silence, and instantly the gaze of over a hundred thousand persons was directed towards a pile forming the eastern section of the building.

There was a basement first, broken in the middle by a broad arched passage, called the *Porta Pompæ*, over which, on an elevated tribunal magnificently decorated with insignia and legionary standards, the consul sat in the place of honor. On both sides of the passage the basement was divided into stalls termed *carceres*, each protected in front by massive gates swung to statuesque pilasters. Over the stalls next was a cornice crowned by a low balustrade; back of which the seats arose in theatre

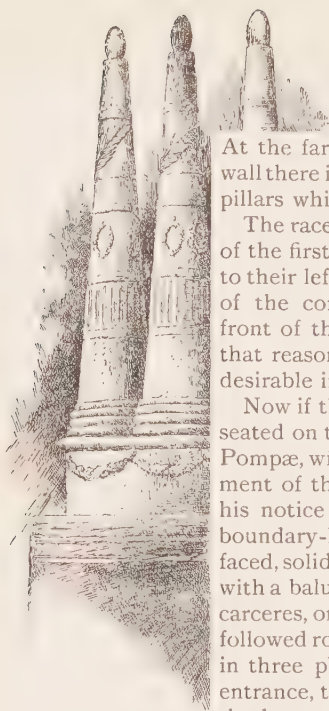
arrangement, all occupied by a throng of dignitaries superbly attired. The pile extended the width of the Circus, and was flanked on both sides by towers, which, besides helping the architects give grace to their work, served the velaria, or purple awnings, stretched between them so as to throw the whole quarter in a shade that became exceedingly grateful as the day advanced.

This structure, it is now thought, can be made useful in helping the reader to a sufficient understanding of the arrangement of the rest of the interior of the Circus. He has only to fancy himself seated on the tribunal with the consul, facing to the west, where everything is under his eye.

On the right and left, if he will look, he will see the main entrances, very ample, and guarded by gates hinged to the towers.

Directly below him is the arena — a level plane of considerable extent, covered with a fine white sand. There all the trials will take place except the running.

Looking across this sanded arena westwardly still, there is a pedestal of marble supporting three low conical pillars of gray stone, much carven. Many an eye will hunt for those pillars before the day is done, for they are the first goal, and mark the beginning and end of the race-course. Behind the pedestal, leaving a passage-way and space for an altar, commences a wall ten or twelve feet in breadth and five or six in height, extending thence exactly two hundred yards, or one Olympic stadium.



At the farther, or westward, extremity of the wall there is another pedestal, surmounted with pillars which mark the second goal.

The racers will enter the course on the right of the first goal, and keep the wall all the time to their left. The beginning and ending points of the contest lie, consequently, directly in front of the consul across the arena; and for that reason his seat was admittedly the most desirable in the Circus.

Now if the reader, who is still supposed to be seated on the consular tribunal over the Porta Pompæ, will look up from the ground arrangement of the interior, the first point to attract his notice will be the marking of the outer boundary-line of the course—that is, a plain-faced, solid wall, fifteen or twenty feet in height, with a balustrade on its cope, like that over the carceres, or stalls, in the east. This balcony, if followed round the course, will be found broken in three places to allow passages of exit and entrance, two in the north and one in the west; the latter very ornate, and called the Gate of Triumph, because, when all is over, the victors will pass out that way, crowned, and with triumphal escort and ceremonies.

At the west end the balcony encloses the course in the form of a half-circle, and is made to uphold two great galleries.

Directly behind the balustrade on the coping of the balcony is the first seat, from which ascend the succeeding benches, each higher than the one in front of it; giving to view a spectacle of surpassing interest—the spectacle

of a vast space ruddy and glistening with human faces, and rich with vari-colored costumes.

The commonalty occupy quarters over in the west, beginning at the point of termination of an awning, stretched, it would seem, for the accommodation of the better classes exclusively.

Having thus the whole interior of the Circus under view at the moment of the sounding of the trumpets, let the reader next imagine the multitude seated and sunk to sudden silence, and motionless in its intensity of interest.

Out of the Porta Pompæ over in the east rises a sound mixed of voices and instruments harmonized. Presently, forth issues the chorus of the procession with which the celebration begins; the editor and civic authorities of the city, givers of the games, follow in robes and garlands; then the gods, some on platforms borne by men, others in great four-wheel carriages gorgeously decorated; next them, again, the contestants of the day, each in costume exactly as he will run, wrestle, leap, box, or drive.

Slowly crossing the arena, the procession proceeds to make circuit of the course. The display is beautiful and imposing. Approval runs before it in a shout, as the water rises and swells in front of a boat in motion. If the dumb, figured gods make no sign of appreciation of the welcome, the editor and his associates are not so backward.

The reception of the athletes is even more demonstrative, for there is not a man in the assemblage who has not something in wager upon them, though but a mite or farthing. And



it is noticeable, as the classes move by, that the favorites among them are easily singled out : either their names are loudest in the uproar, or they are more profusely showered with wreaths and garlands tossed to them from the balcony.

If there is a question as to the popularity with the public of the several games, it is now put to rest. To the splendor of the chariots and the superexcellent beauty of the horses, the charioteers add the personality necessary to perfect the charm of their display. Their tunics, short, sleeveless, and of the finest woolen texture, are of the assigned colors. A horseman accompanies each one of them except Ben-Hur, who, for some reason—possibly distrust—has chosen to go alone ; so, too, they are all helmeted but him. As they approach, the spectators stand upon the benches, and there is a sensible deepening of the clamor, in which a sharp listener may detect the shrill piping of women and children ; at the same time, the things roseate flying from the balcony thicken into a storm, and, striking the men, drop into the chariot-beds, which are threatened with filling to the tops. Even the horses have a share in the ovation ; nor may it be said they are less conscious than their masters of the honors they receive.

Very soon, as with the other contestants, it is made apparent that some of the drivers are more in favor than others ; and then the discovery follows that nearly every individual on the benches, women and children as well as men, wears a color, most frequently a ribbon

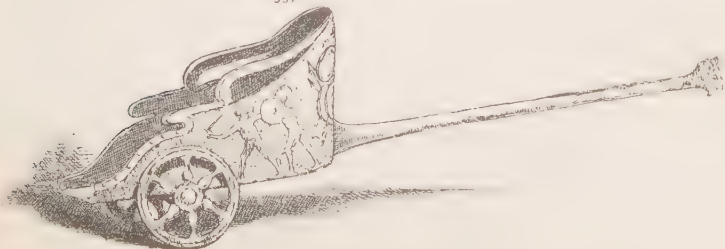
upon the breast or in the hair: now it is green, now yellow, now blue; but, searching the great body carefully, it is manifest that there is a preponderance of white and scarlet and gold.

In a modern assemblage called together as this one is, particularly where there are sums at hazard upon the race, a preference would be decided by the qualities or performance of the horses; here, however, nationality was the rule. If the Byzantine and Sidonian found small support, it was because their cities were scarcely represented on the benches. On their side, the Greeks, though very numerous, were divided between the Corinthian and the Athenian, leaving but a scant showing of green and yellow. Messala's scarlet and gold would have been but little better had not the citizens of Antioch, proverbially a race of courtiers, joined the Romans by adopting the color of their favorite. There were left then the country people, or Syrians, the Jews, and the Arabs; and they, from faith in the blood of the sheik's four, blended largely with hate of the Romans, whom they desired, above all things, to see beaten and humbled, mounted the white, making the most noisy, and probably the most numerous, faction of all.

As the charioteers move on in the circuit, the excitement increases; at the second goal, where, especially in the galleries, the white is the ruling color, the people exhaust their flow-ers and rive the air with screams.

"Messala! Messala!"

"Ben-Hur! Ben-Hur!"





Such are the cries.

Upon the passage of the procession, the factionists take their seats and resume conversation.

"Ah, by Bacchus! was he not handsome?" exclaims a woman, whose Romanism is betrayed by the colors flying in her hair.

"And how splendid his chariot!" replies a neighbor, of the same proclivities. "It is all ivory and gold. Jupiter grant he wins!"

The notes on the bench behind them were entirely different.

"A hundred shekels on the Jew!"

The voice is high and shrill.

"Nay, be thou not rash," whispers a moderating friend to the speaker. "The children of Jacob are not much given to Gentile sports, which are too often accursed in the sight of the Lord."

"True, but saw you ever one more cool and assured? And what an arm he has!"

"And what horses!" says a third.

"And for that," a fourth one adds, "they say he has all the tricks of the Romans."

A woman completes the eulogium:

"Yes, and he is even handsomer than the Roman."

Thus encouraged, the enthusiast shrieks again, "A hundred shekels on the Jew!"

"Thou fool!" answers an Antiochian, from a bench well forward on the balcony. "Knowest thou not there are fifty talents laid against him, six to one, on Messala? Put up thy shekels, lest Abraham rise and smite thee."

"Ha, ha! thou ass of Antioch! Cease thy bray. Knowest thou not it was Messala betting on himself?"

Such the reply.

And so ran the controversy, not always good-natured.

When at length the march was ended and the Porta Pompæ received back the procession, Ben-Hur knew he had his prayer.

The eyes of the East were upon his contest with Messala.

CHAPTER XIII

THE START

BOUT three o'clock, speaking in modern style, the programme was concluded except the chariot-race. The editor, wisely considerate of the comfort of the people, chose that time for a recess. At once the vomitoria were thrown open, and all who could hastened to the portico outside where the restaurateurs had their quarters. Those who remained yawned, talked, gossiped, consulted their tablets, and, all distinctions else forgotten, merged into but two classes—the winners, who were happy, and the losers, who were grum and captious.

Now, however, a third class of spectators, composed of citizens who desired only to witness the chariot-race, availed themselves of the recess to come in and take their reserved seats; by so doing they thought to attract the least attention and give the least offence. Among



these were Simonides and his party, whose places were in the vicinity of the main entrance on the north side, opposite the consul.

As the four stout servants carried the merchant in his chair up the aisle, curiosity was much excited. Presently some one called his name. Those about caught it and passed it on along the benches to the west; and there was hurried climbing on seats to get sight of the man about whom common report had coined and put in circulation a romance so mixed of good-fortune and bad that the like had never been known or heard of before.

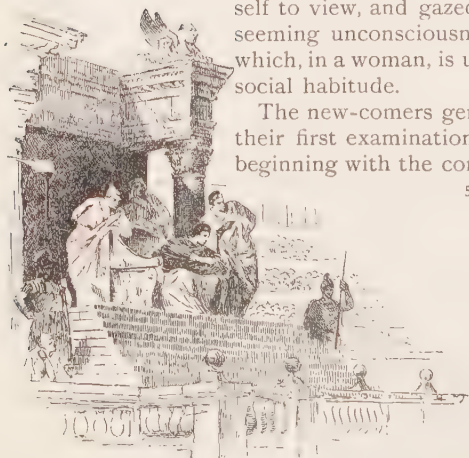
Ilderim was also recognized and warmly greeted; but nobody knew Balthasar or the two women who followed him closely veiled.

The people made way for the party respectfully, and the ushers seated them in easy speaking distance of each other down by the balustrade overlooking the arena. In providence of comfort, they sat upon cushions and had stools for foot-rests.

The women were Iras and Esther.

Upon being seated, the latter cast a frightened look over the Circus, and drew the veil closer about her face; while the Egyptian, letting her veil fall upon her shoulders, gave herself to view, and gazed at the scene with the seeming unconsciousness of being stared at, which, in a woman, is usually the result of long social habitude.

The new-comers generally were yet making their first examination of the great spectacle, beginning with the consul and his attendants,





when some workmen ran in and commenced to stretch a chalked rope across the arena from balcony to balcony in front of the pillars of the first goal.

About the same time, also, six men came in through the Porta Pompæ and took post, one in front of each occupied stall; whereat there was a prolonged hum of voices in every quarter.

"See, see! The green goes to number four on the right; the Athenian is there."

"And Messala—yes, he is in number two."

"The Corinthian—"

"Watch the white! See, he crosses over, he stops; number one it is—number one on the left."

"No, the black stops there, and the white at number two."

"So it is."

These gate-keepers, it should be understood, were dressed in tunics colored like those of the competing charioteers; so, when they took their stations, everybody knew the particular stall in which his favorite was that moment waiting.

"Did you ever see Messala?" the Egyptian asked Esther.

The Jewess shuddered as she answered no. If not her father's enemy, the Roman was Ben-Hur's.

"He is beautiful as Apollo."

As Iras spoke, her large eyes brightened and she shook her jewelled fan. Esther looked at her with the thought, "Is he, then, so much handsomer than Ben-Hur?" Next moment

she heard Ilderim say to her father, "Yes, his stall is number two on the left of the Porta Pompæ;" and, thinking it was of Ben-Hur he spoke, her eyes turned that way. Taking but the briefest glance at the wattled face of the gate, she drew the veil close and muttered a little prayer.

Presently Sanballat came to the party.

"I am just from the stalls, O sheik," he said, bowing gravely to Ilderim, who began combing his beard, while his eyes glittered with eager inquiry. "The horses are in perfect condition."

Ilderim replied simply, "If they are beaten, I pray it be by some other than Messala."

Turning then to Simonides, Sanballat drew out a tablet, saying, "I bring you also something of interest. I reported, you will remember, the wager concluded with Messala last night, and stated that I left another which, if taken, was to be delivered to me in writing to-day before the race began. Here it is."

Simonides took the tablet and read the memorandum carefully.

"Yes," he said, "their emissary came to ask me if you had so much money with me. Keep the tablet close. If you lose, you know where to come; if you win"—his face knit hard—"if you win—ah, friend, see to it! See the signers escape not; hold them to the last shekel. That is what they would wish us."

"Trust me," replied the purveyor.

"Will you not sit with us?" asked Simonides.

"You are very good," the other returned;



"but if I leave the consul, young Rome yonder will boil over. Peace to you ; peace to all."

At length the recess came to an end.

The trumpeters blew a call at which the absentees rushed back to their places. At the same time, some attendants appeared in the arena, and, climbing upon the division-wall, went to an entablature near the second goal at the west end, and placed upon it seven wooden balls ; then returning to the first goal, upon an entablature there they set up seven other pieces of wood hewn to represent dolphins.

"What shall they do with the balls and fishes, O sheik ?" asked Balthasar.

"Hast thou never attended a race ?"

"Never before ; and hardly know I why I am here."

"Well, they are to keep the count. At the end of each round run thou shalt see one ball and one fish taken down."

The preparations were now complete, and presently a trumpeter in gaudy uniform arose by the editor, ready to blow the signal of commencement promptly at his order. Straightway the stir of the people and the hum of their conversation died away, Every face near by, and every face in the lessening perspective, turned to the east, as all eyes settled upon the gates of the six stalls which shut in the competitors.

The unusual flush upon his face gave proof that even Simonides had caught the universal excitement. Ilderim pulled his beard fast and furious.



"Look now for the Roman," said the fair Egyptian to Esther, who did not hear her, for, with close-drawn veil and beating heart, she sat watching for Ben-Hur.

The structure containing the stalls, it should be observed, was in form of the segment of a circle, retired on the right so that its central point was projected forward, and midway the course, on the starting side of the first goal. Every stall, consequently, was equally distant from the starting-line or chalked rope above mentioned.

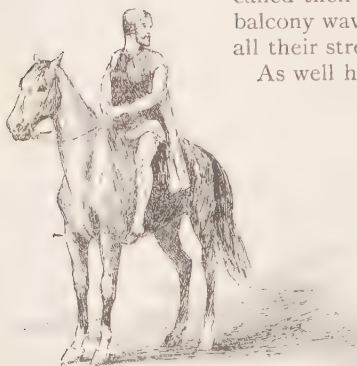
The trumpet sounded short and sharp; whereupon the starters, one for each chariot, leaped down from behind the pillars of the goal, ready to give assistance if any of the fours proved unmanageable.

Again the trumpet blew, and simultaneously the gate-keepers threw the stalls open.

First appeared the mounted attendants of the charioteers, five in all, Ben-Hur having rejected the service. The chalked line was lowered to let them pass, then raised again. They were beautifully mounted, yet scarcely observed as they rode forward; for all the time the trampling of eager horses, and the voices of drivers scarcely less eager, were heard behind in the stalls, so that one might not look away an instant from the gaping doors.

The chalked line up again, the gate-keepers called their men; instantly the ushers on the balcony waved their hands, and shouted with all their strength, "Down! down!"

As well have whistled to stay a storm.





Forth from each stall, like missiles in a volley from so many great guns, rushed the six fours; and up the vast assemblage arose, electrified and irrepressible, and, leaping upon the benches, filled the Circus and the air above it with yells and screams. This was the time for which they had so patiently waited!—this the moment of supreme interest treasured up in talk and dreams since the proclamation of the games!

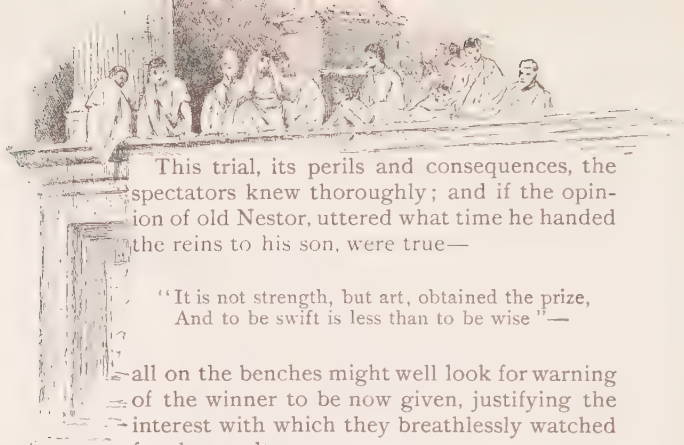
“He is come—there—look!” cried Iras, pointing to Messala.

“I see him,” answered Esther, looking at Ben-Hur.

The veil was withdrawn. For an instant the little Jewess was brave. An idea of the joy there is in doing an heroic deed under the eyes of a multitude came to her, and she understood ever after how, at such times, the souls of men, in the frenzy of performance, laugh at death or forget it utterly.

The competitors were now under view from nearly every part of the Circus, yet the race was not begun; they had first to make the chalked line successfully.

The line was stretched for the purpose of equalizing the start. If it were dashed upon, discomfiture of man and horses might be apprehended; on the other hand, to approach it timidly was to incur the hazard of being thrown behind in the beginning of the race; and that was certain forfeit of the great advantage always striven for—the position next the division-wall on the inner line of the course.



This trial, its perils and consequences, the spectators knew thoroughly; and if the opinion of old Nestor, uttered what time he handed the reins to his son, were true—

“It is not strength, but art, obtained the prize,
And to be swift is less than to be wise”—

all on the benches might well look for warning of the winner to be now given, justifying the interest with which they breathlessly watched for the result.

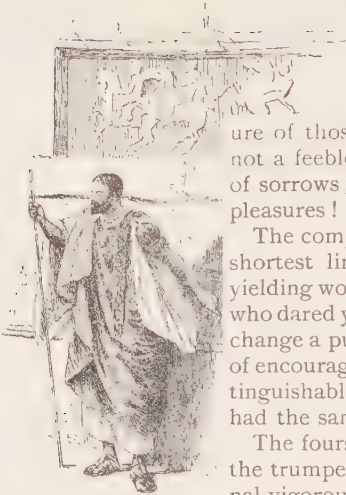
The arena swam in a dazzle of light; yet each driver looked first thing for the rope, then for the coveted inner line. So, all six aiming at the same point and speeding furiously, a collision seemed inevitable; nor that merely. What if the editor, at the last moment, dissatisfied with the start, should withhold the signal to drop the rope? Or if he should not give it in time?

The crossing was about two hundred and fifty feet in width. Quick the eye, steady the hand, unerring the judgment required. If now one look away! or his mind wander! or a rein slip! And what attraction in the ensemble of the thousands over the spreading balcony! Calculating upon the natural impulse to give one glance—just one—in sooth of curiosity or vanity, malice might be there with an artifice; while friendship and love, did they serve the same result, might be as deadly as malice.

The divine last touch in perfecting the beautiful is animation. Can we accept the saying,

then these latter days, so tame in pastime and dull in sports, have scarcely anything to compare to the spectacle offered by the six contestants. Let the reader try to fancy it; let him first look down upon the arena, and see it glistening in its frame of dull-gray granite walls; let him then, in this perfect field, see the chariots, light of wheel, very graceful, and ornate as paint and burnishing can make them—Mes-sala's rich with ivory and gold; let him see the drivers, erect and statuesque, undisturbed by the motion of the cars, their limbs naked, and fresh and ruddy with the healthful polish of the baths—in their right hands goads, suggestive of torture dreadful to the thought—in their left hands, held in careful separation, and high, that they may not interfere with view of the steeds, the reins passing taut from the fore ends of the carriage-poles; let him see the fours, chosen for beauty as well as speed; let him see them in magnificent action, their masters not more conscious of the situation and all that is asked and hoped from them—their heads tossing, nostrils in play, now distended, now contracted—limbs too dainty for the sand which they touch but to spurn—limbs slender, yet with impact crushing as hammers—every muscle of the rounded bodies instinct with glorious life, swelling, diminishing, justifying the world in taking from them its ultimate measure of force; finally, along with chariots, drivers, horses, let the reader see the accompanying shadows fly; and, with such distinctness as the picture comes, he may share the satisfaction and deeper pleas-





ure of those to whom it was a thrilling fact, not a feeble fancy. Every age has its plenty of sorrows; Heaven help where there are no pleasures!

The competitors having started each on the shortest line for the position next the wall, yielding would be like giving up the race; and who dared yield? It is not in common nature to change a purpose in mid-career; and the cries of encouragement from the balcony were indistinguishable and indescribable: a roar which had the same effect upon all the drivers.

The fours neared the rope together. Then the trumpeter by the editor's side blew a signal vigorously. Twenty feet away it was not heard. Seeing the action, however, the judges dropped the rope, and not an instant too soon, for the hoof of one of Messala's horses struck it as it fell. Nothing daunted, the Roman shook out his long lash, loosed the reins, leaned forward, and, with a triumphant shout, took the wall.

"Jove with us! Jove with us!" yelled all the Roman faction, in a frenzy of delight.

As Messala turned in, the bronze lion's head at the end of his axle caught the fore-leg of the Athenian's right-hand trace-mate, flinging the brute over against its yoke-fellow. Both staggered, struggled, and lost their head-way. The ushers had their will at least in part. The thousands held their breath with horror; only up where the consul sat was there shouting.

"Jove with us!" screamed Drusus, frantically.

"He wins! Jove with us!" answered his associates, seeing Messala speed on.

Tablet in hand, Sanballat turned to them; a crash from the course below stopped his speech, and he could not but look that way.

Messala having passed, the Corinthian was the only contestant on the Athenian's right, and to that side the latter tried to turn his broken four; and then, as ill-fortune would have it, the wheel of the Byzantine, who was next on the left, struck the tail-piece of his chariot, knocking his feet from under him. There was a crash, a scream of rage and fear, and the unfortunate Cleanthes fell under the hoofs of his own steeds: a terrible sight, against which Esther covered her eyes.

On swept the Corinthian, on the Byzantine, on the Sidonian.

Sanballat looked for Ben-Hur, and turned again to Drusus and his coterie.

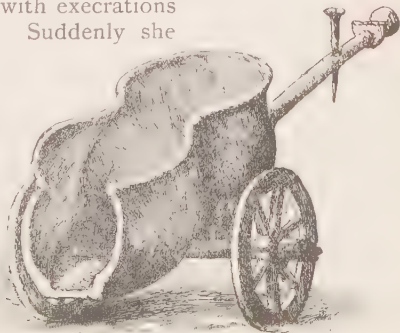
"A hundred sestertii on the Jew!" he cried.

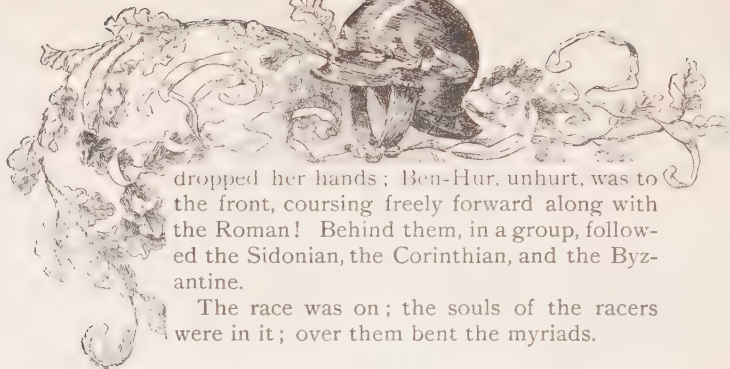
"Taken!" answered Drusus.

"Another hundred on the Jew!" shouted Sanballat.

Nobody appeared to hear him. He called again; the situation below was too absorbing, and they were too busy shouting, "Messala! Messala! Jove with us!"

When the Jewess ventured to look again, a party of workmen were removing the horses and broken car; another party were taking off the man himself; and every bench upon which there was a Greek was vocal with execrations and prayers for vengeance. Suddenly she





dropped her hands ; Ben-Hur, unhurt, was to the front, coursing freely forward along with the Roman ! Behind them, in a group, followed the Sidonian, the Corinthian, and the Byzantine.

The race was on ; the souls of the racers were in it ; over them bent the myriads.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RACE

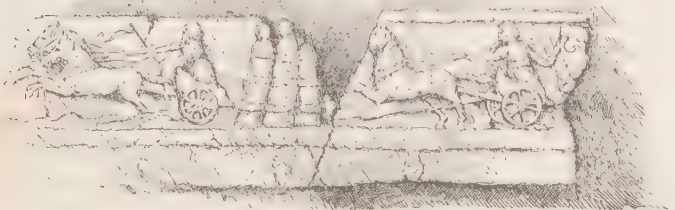
WHEN the dash for position began, Ben-Hur, as we have seen, was on the extreme left of the six. For a moment, like the others, he was half blinded by the light in the arena ; yet he managed to catch sight of his antagonists and divine their purpose. At Messala, who was more than an antagonist to him, he gave one searching look. The air of passionless hauteur characteristic of the fine patrician face was there as of old, and so was the Italian beauty, which the helmet rather increased ; but more—it may have been a jealous fancy, or the effect of the brassy shadow in which the features were at the moment cast, still the Israelite thought he saw the soul of the man as through a glass, darkly : cruel, cunning, desperate ; not so excited as determined—a soul in a tension of watchfulness and fierce resolve.

In a time not longer than was required to turn to his four again, Ben-Hur felt his own resolution harden to a like temper. At what-

ever cost, at all hazards, he would humble this enemy! Prize, friends, wagers, honor—everything that can be thought of as a possible interest in the race was lost in the one deliberate purpose. Regard for life even should not hold him back. Yet there was no passion, on his part; no blinding rush of heated blood from heart to brain, and back again; no impulse to fling himself upon Fortune: he did not believe in Fortune; far otherwise. He had his plan, and, confiding in himself, he settled to the task, never more observant, never more capable. The air about him seemed aglow with a renewed and perfect transparency.

When not half-way across the arena, he saw that Messala's rush would, if there was no collision, and the rope fell, give him the wall; that the rope would fall, he ceased as soon to doubt; and, further, it came to him, a sudden flash-like insight, that Messala knew it was to be let drop at the last moment (prearrangement with the editor could safely reach that point in the contest); and it suggested, what more Roman-like than for the official to lend himself to a countryman who, besides being so popular, had also so much at stake? There could be no other accounting for the confidence with which Messala pushed his four forward the instant his competitors were prudentially checking their fours in front of the obstruction—no other except madness.

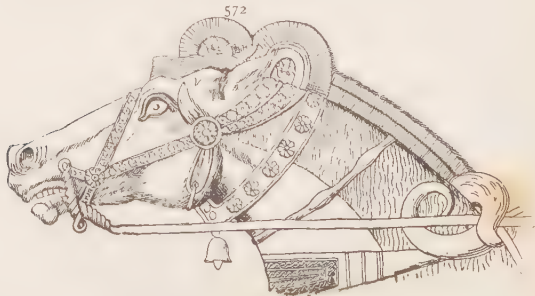
It is one thing to see a necessity and another to act upon it. Ben-Hur yielded the wall for the time.

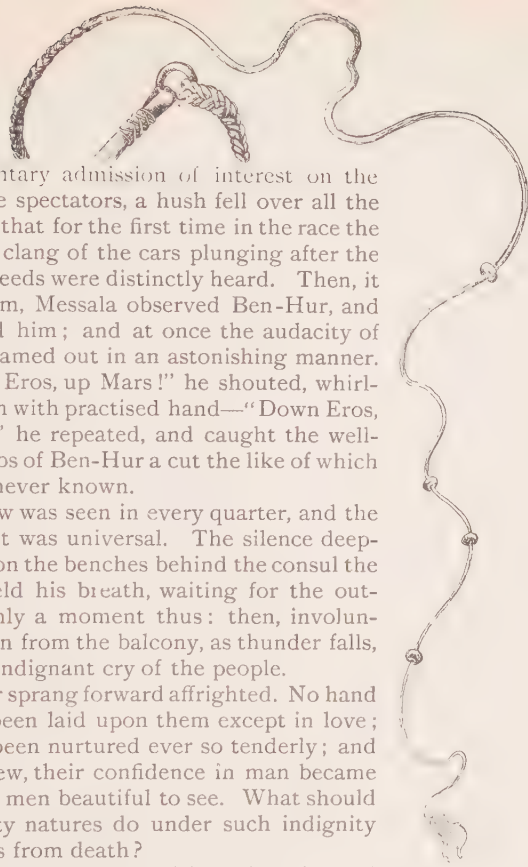


The rope fell, and all the fours but his sprang into the course under urgency of voice and lash. He drew head to the right, and, with all the speed of his Arabs, darted across the trails of his opponents, the angle of movement being such as to lose the least time and gain the greatest possible advance. So, while the spectators were shivering at the Athenian's mishap, and the Sidonian, Byzantine, and Corinthian were striving, with such skill as they possessed, to avoid involvement in the ruin, Ben-Hur swept around and took the course neck and neck with Messala, though on the outside. The marvellous skill shown in making the change thus from the extreme left across to the right without appreciable loss did not fail the sharp eyes upon the benches: the Circus seemed to rock and rock again with prolonged applause. Then Esther clasped her hands in glad surprise; then Sanballat, smiling, offered his hundred sestertii a second time without a taker; and then the Romans began to doubt, thinking Messala might have found an equal, if not a master, and that in an Israelite!

And now, racing together side by side, a narrow interval between them, the two neared the second goal.

The pedestal of the three pillars there, viewed from the west, was a stone wall in the form of a half-circle, around which the course and opposite balcony were bent in exact parallelism. Making this turn was considered in all respects the most telling test of a charioteer; it was, in fact, the very feat in which Orestes failed. As





an involuntary admission of interest on the part of the spectators, a hush fell over all the Circus, so that for the first time in the race the rattle and clang of the cars plunging after the tugging steeds were distinctly heard. Then, it would seem, Messala observed Ben-Hur, and recognized him; and at once the audacity of the man flamed out in an astonishing manner.

"Down Eros, up Mars!" he shouted, whirling his lash with practised hand—"Down Eros, up Mars!" he repeated, and caught the well-doing Arabs of Ben-Hur a cut the like of which they had never known.

The blow was seen in every quarter, and the amazement was universal. The silence deepened; up on the benches behind the consul the boldest held his breath, waiting for the outcome. Only a moment thus: then, involuntarily, down from the balcony, as thunder falls, burst the indignant cry of the people.

The four sprang forward affrighted. No hand had ever been laid upon them except in love; they had been nurtured ever so tenderly; and as they grew, their confidence in man became a lesson to men beautiful to see. What should such dainty natures do under such indignity but leap as from death?

Forward they sprang as with one impulse, and forward leaped the car. Past question, every experience is serviceable to us. Where got Ben-Hur the large hand and mighty grip which helped him now so well? Where but from the oar with which so long he fought the sea? And what was this spring of the floor under his feet

to the dizzy eccentric lurch with which in the old time the trembling ship yielded to the beat of staggering billows, drunk with their power? So he kept his place, and gave the four free rein, and called to them in soothing voice, trying merely to guide them round the dangerous turn; and before the fever of the people began to abate, he had back the mastery. Nor that only: on approaching the first goal, he was again side by side with Messala, bearing with him the sympathy and admiration of every one not a Roman. So clearly was the feeling shown, so vigorous its manifestation, that Messala, with all his boldness, felt it unsafe to trifle further.

As the cars whirled round the goal, Esther caught sight of Ben-Hur's face—a little pale, a little higher raised, otherwise calm, even placid.

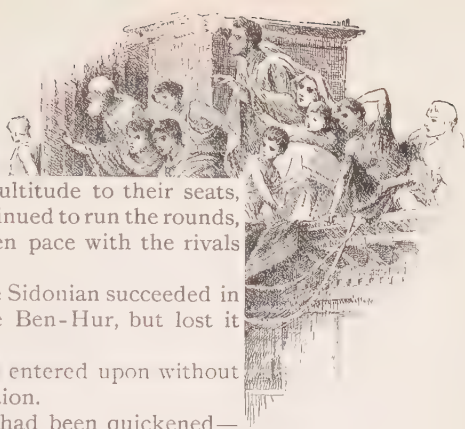
Immediately a man climbed on the entablature at the west end of the division-wall, and took down one of the conical wooden balls. A dolphin on the east entablature was taken down at the same time.

In like manner, the second ball and second dolphin disappeared.

And then the third ball and third dolphin.

Three rounds concluded: still Messala held the inside position; still Ben-Hur moved with him side by side; still the other competitors followed as before. The contest began to have the appearance of one of the double races which became so popular in Rome during the later Cæsarian period—Messala and Ben-Hur in the first, the Corinthian, Sidonian, and Byzantine in the second. Meantime the ushers succeed-





ed in returning the multitude to their seats, though the clamor continued to run the rounds, keeping, as it were, even pace with the rivals in the course below.

In the fifth round the Sidonian succeeded in getting a place outside Ben-Hur, but lost it directly.

The sixth round was entered upon without change of relative position.

Gradually the speed had been quickened—gradually the blood of the competitors warmed with the work. Men and beasts seemed to know alike that the final crisis was near, bringing the time for the winner to assert himself.

The interest which from the beginning had centred chiefly in the struggle between the Roman and the Jew, with an intense and general sympathy for the latter, was fast changing to anxiety on his account. On all the benches the spectators bent forward motionless, except as their faces turned following the contestants. Ilderim quitted combing his beard, and Esther forgot her fears.

"A hundred sestertii on the Jew!" cried Sanballat to the Romans under the consul's awning.

There was no reply.

"A talent—or five talents, or ten; choose ye!"

He shook his tablets at them defiantly.

"I will take thy sestertii," answered a Roman youth, preparing to write.

"Do not so," interposed a friend.

"Why?"

"Messala hath reached his utmost speed. See him lean over his chariot-rim, the reins



loose as flying ribbons. Look then at the Jew."

The first one looked.

"By Hercules!" he replied, his countenance falling. "The dog throws all his weight on the bits. I see, I see! If the gods help not our friend, he will be run away with by the Israelite. No, not yet. Look! Jove with us, Jove with us!"

The cry, swelled by every Latin tongue, shook the velaria over the consul's head.

If it were true that Messala had attained his utmost speed, the effort was with effect; slowly but certainly he was beginning to forge ahead. His horses were running with their heads low down; from the balcony their bodies appeared actually to skim the earth; their nostrils showed blood-red in expansion; their eyes seemed straining in their sockets. Certainly the good steeds were doing their best! How long could they keep the pace? It was but the commencement of the sixth round. On they dashed. As they neared the second goal, Ben-Hur turned in behind the Roman's car.

The joy of the Messala faction reached its bound: they screamed and howled, and tossed their colors; and Sanballat filled his tablets with wagers of their tendering.

Malluch, in the lower gallery over the Gate of Triumph, found it hard to keep his cheer. He had cherished the vague hint dropped to him by Ben-Hur of something to happen in the turning of the western pillars. It was the fifth round, yet the something had not come;

and he had said to himself, the sixth will bring it; but, lo! Ben-Hur was hardly holding a place at the tail of his enemy's car.

Over in the east end, Simonides' party held their peace. The merchant's head was bent low. Ilderim tugged at his beard, and dropped his brows till there was nothing of his eyes but an occasional sparkle of light. Esther scarcely breathed. Iras alone appeared glad.

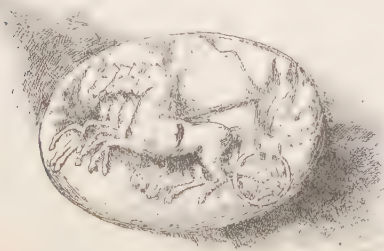
Along the home-stretch—sixth round—Messala leading, next him Ben-Hur, and so close it was the old story:

“First flew Eumelus on Pheretian steeds;
With those of Tros bold Diomed succeeds;
Close on Eumelus' back they puff the wind,
And seem just mounting on his car behind;
Full on his neck he feels the sultry breeze,
And, hovering o'er, their stretching shadow sees.”

Thus to the first goal, and round it. Messala, fearful of losing his place, hugged the stony wall with perilous clasp; a foot to the left, and he had been dashed to pieces; yet, when the turn was finished, no man, looking at the wheel-tracks of the two cars, could have said, here went Messala, there the Jew. They left but one trace behind them.

As they whirled by, Esther saw Ben-Hur's face again, and it was whiter than before.

Simonides, shrewder than Esther, said to Ilderim, the moment the rivals turned into the course, “I am no judge, good sheik, if Ben-Hur be not about to execute some design. His face hath that look.”





To which Ilderim answered, "Saw you how clean they were and fresh? By the splendor of God, friend, they have not been running! But now watch!"

One ball and one dolphin remained on the entablatures; and all the people drew a long breath, for the beginning of the end was at hand.

First, the Sidonian gave the scourge to his four, and, smarting with fear and pain, they dashed desperately forward, promising for a brief time to go to the front. The effort ended in promise. Next, the Byzantine and Corinthian each made the trial with like result, after which they were practically out of the race. Thereupon, with a readiness perfectly explicable, all the factions except the Romans joined hope in Ben-Hur, and openly indulged their feeling.

"Ben-Hur! Ben-Hur!" they shouted, and the blended voices of the many rolled overwhelmingly against the consular stand.

From the benches above him as he passed, the favor descended in fierce injunctions.

"Speed thee, Jew!"

"Take the wall now!"

"On! loose the Arabs! Give them rein and scourge!"

"Let him not have the turn on thee again. Now or never!"

Over the balustrade they stooped low, stretching their hands imploringly to him.

Either he did not hear, or could not do better, for half-way round the course and he was

still following ; at the second goal even still no change!

And now, to make the turn, Messala began to draw in his left-hand steeds, an act which necessarily slackened their speed. His spirit was high ; more than one altar was richer of his vows ; the Roman genius was still president. On the three pillars only six hundred feet away were fame, increase of fortune, promotions, and a triumph ineffably sweetened by hate, all in store for him ! That moment Mal-luch, in the gallery, saw Ben-Hur lean forward over his Arabs, and give them the reins. Out flew the many-folded lash in his hand ; over the backs of the startled steeds it writhed and hissed, and hissed and writhed again and again ; and though it fell not, there were both sting and menace in its quick report ; and as the man passed thus from quiet to resistless action his face suffused, his eyes gleaming, along the reins he seemed to flash his will ; and instantly not one, but the four as one, answered with a leap that landed them alongside the Roman's car. Messala, on the perilous edge of the goal, heard, but dared not look to see what the awakening portended. From the people he received no sign. Above the noises of the race there was but one voice, and that was Ben-Hur's. In the old Aramaic, as the sheik himself, he called to the Arabs,

"On, Atair ! On, Rigel ! What, Antares ! dost thou linger now ? Good horse—oho, Al-debaran ! I hear them singing in the tents. I hear the children singing and the women—



singing of the stars, of Atair, Antares, Rigel, Aldebaran, victory!—and the song will never end. Well done! Home to-morrow, under the black tent—home! On, Antares! The tribe is waiting for us, and the master is waiting! 'Tis done! 'tis done! Ha, ha! We have overthrown the proud. The hand that smote us is in the dust. Ours the glory! Ha, ha!—steady! The work is done—soho! Rest!"

There had never been anything of the kind more simple; seldom anything so instantaneous.

At the moment chosen for the dash, Messala was moving in a circle round the goal. To pass him, Ben-Hur had to cross the track, and good strategy required the movement to be in a forward direction; that is, on a like circle limited to the least possible increase. The thousands on the benches understood it all: they saw the signal given—the magnificent response; the four close outside Messala's outer wheel, Ben-Hur's inner wheel behind the other's car—all this they saw. Then they heard a crash loud enough to send a thrill through the Circus, and, quicker than thought, out over the course a spray of shining white and yellow flinders flew. Down on its right side toppled the bed of the Roman's chariot. There was a rebound as of the axle hitting the hard earth; another and another; then the car went to pieces; and Messala, entangled in the reins, pitched forward headlong.

To increase the horror of the sight by making death certain, the Sidonian, who had the

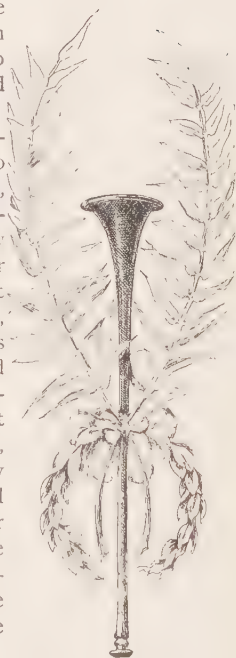


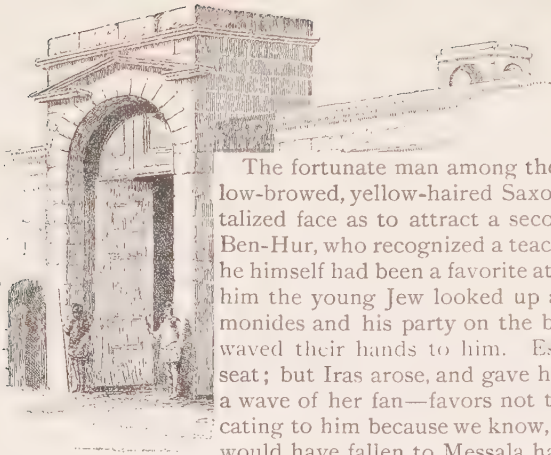
wall next behind, could not stop or turn out. Into the wreck full speed he drove ; then over the Roman, and into the latter's four, all mad with fear. Presently, out of the turmoil, the fighting of horses, the resound of blows, the murky cloud of dust and sand, he crawled, in time to see the Corinthian and Byzantine go on down the course after Ben-Hur, who had not been an instant delayed.

The people arose, and leaped upon the benches, and shouted and screamed. Those who looked that way caught glimpses of Messala, now under the trampling of the fours, now under the abandoned cars. He was still, they thought him dead ; but far the greater number followed Ben-Hur in his career. They had not seen the cunning touch of the reins by which, turning a little to the left, he caught Messala's wheel with the iron-shod point of his axle, and crushed it ; but they had seen the transformation of the man, and themselves felt the heat and glow of his spirit, the heroic resolution, the maddening energy of action with which, by look, word, and gesture, he so suddenly inspired his Arabs. And such running ! It was rather the long leaping of lions in harness ; but for the lumbering chariot, it seemed the four were flying. When the Byzantine and Corinthian were half-way down the course, Ben-Hur turned the first goal.

And the race was won !

The consul arose ; the people shouted themselves hoarse ; the editor came down from his seat, and crowned the victors.





The fortunate man among the boxers was a low-browed, yellow-haired Saxon, of such brutalized face as to attract a second look from Ben-Hur, who recognized a teacher with whom he himself had been a favorite at Rome. From him the young Jew looked up and beheld Simonides and his party on the balcony. They waved their hands to him. Esther kept her seat; but Iras arose, and gave him a smile and a wave of her fan—favours not the less intoxicating to him because we know, O reader, they would have fallen to Messala had he been the victor.

The procession was then formed, and, midst the shouting of the multitude which had had its will, passed out of the Gate of Triumph.

And the day was over.

CHAPTER XV

THE INVITATION OF IRAS



BEN-HUR tarried across the river with Ilderim; for at midnight, as previously determined, they would take the road which the caravan, then thirty hours out, had pursued.

The sheik was happy; his offers of gifts had been royal; but Ben-Hur had refused everything, insisting that he was satisfied with the humiliation of his enemy. The generous dispute was long continued.

"Think," the sheik would say, "what thou hast done for me. In every black tent down

to the Akaba and to the ocean, and across to the Euphrates, and beyond to the sea of the Scythians, the renown of my Mira and her children will go; and they who sing of them will magnify me, and forget that I am in the wane of life; and all the spears now masterless will come to me, and my sword-hands multiply past counting. Thou dost not know what it is to have sway of the Desert such as will now be mine. I tell thee it will bring tribute incalculable from commerce, and immunity from kings. Aye, by the sword of Solomon! doth my messenger seek favor for me of Cæsar, that will he get. Yet nothing—nothing?"

And Ben-Hur would answer,

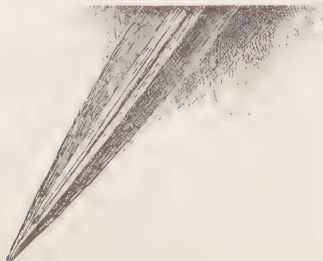
"Nay, sheik, have I not thy hand and heart? Let thy increase of power and influence inure to the King who comes. Who shall say it was not allowed thee for him? In the work I am going to, I may have great need. Saying no now will leave me to ask of thee with better grace hereafter."

In the midst of a controversy of the kind, two messengers arrived—Malluch and one unknown. The former was admitted first.

The good fellow did not attempt to hide his joy over the event of the day.

"But, coming to that with which I am charged," he said, "the master Simonides sends me to say that, upon the adjournment of the games, some of the Roman faction made haste to protest against payment of the money prize."

Ilderim started up, crying, in his shrillest tones,



"By the splendor of God! the East shall decide whether the race was fairly won."

"Nay, good sheik," said Malluch, "the editor has paid the money."

"Tis well."

"When they said Ben-Hur struck Messala's wheel, the editor laughed, and reminded them of the blow the Arabs had at the turn of the goal."

"And what of the Athenian?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!" cried Ben-Hur.

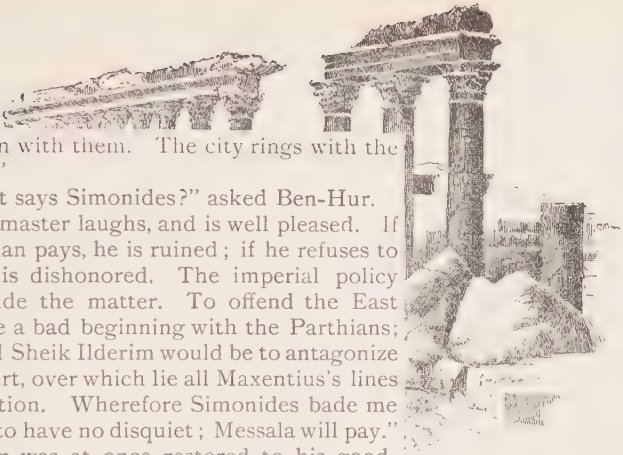
"Dead!" echoed Ilderim. "What fortune these Roman monsters have! Messala escaped?"

"Escaped—yes, O sheik, with life; but it shall be a burden to him. The physicians say he will live, but never walk again."

Ben-Hur looked silently up to heaven. He had a vision of Messala, chair-bound like Simonides, and, like him, going abroad on the shoulders of servants. The good man had abode well; but what would this one with his pride and ambition?

"Simonides bade me say, further," Malluch continued, "Sanballat is having trouble. Drusus, and those who signed with him, referred the question of paying the five talents they lost to the Consul Maxentius, and he has referred it to Cæsar. Messala also refused his losses, and Sanballat, in imitation of Drusus, went to the consul, where the matter is still in advisement. The better Romans say the protestants shall not be excused; and all the adverse fac-





tions join with them. The city rings with the scandal."

"What says Simonides?" asked Ben-Hur.

"The master laughs, and is well pleased. If the Roman pays, he is ruined; if he refuses to pay, he is dishonored. The imperial policy will decide the matter. To offend the East would be a bad beginning with the Parthians; to offend Sheik Ilderim would be to antagonize the Desert, over which lie all Maxentius's lines of operation. Wherefore Simonides bade me tell you to have no disquiet; Messala will pay."

Ilderim was at once restored to his good-humor.

"Let us be off now," he said, rubbing his hands. "The business will do well with Simonides. The glory is ours. I will order the horses."

"Stay," said Malluch. "I left a messenger outside. Will you see him?"

"By the splendor of God! I forgot him."

Malluch retired, and was succeeded by a lad of gentle manners and delicate appearance, who knelt upon one knee, and said, winningly, "Iras, the daughter of Balthasar, well known to good Sheik Ilderim, hath intrusted me with a message to the sheik, who, she saith, will do her great favor so he receive her congratulations on account of the victory of his four."

"The daughter of my friend is kind," said Ilderim, with sparkling eyes. "Do thou give her this jewel, in sign of the pleasure I have from her message."

He took a ring from his finger as he spoke.

"I will as thou sayest, O sheik," the lad replied, and continued, "The daughter of the Egyptian charged me further. She prays the good Sheik Ilderim to send word to the youth Ben-Hur that her father hath taken residence for a time in the palace of Idernee, where she will receive the youth after the fourth hour to-morrow. And if, with her congratulations, Sheik Ilderim will accept her gratitude for this other favor done, she will be ever so pleased."

The sheik looked at Ben-Hur, whose face was suffused with pleasure.

"What will you?" he asked.

"By your leave, O sheik, I will see the fair Egyptian."

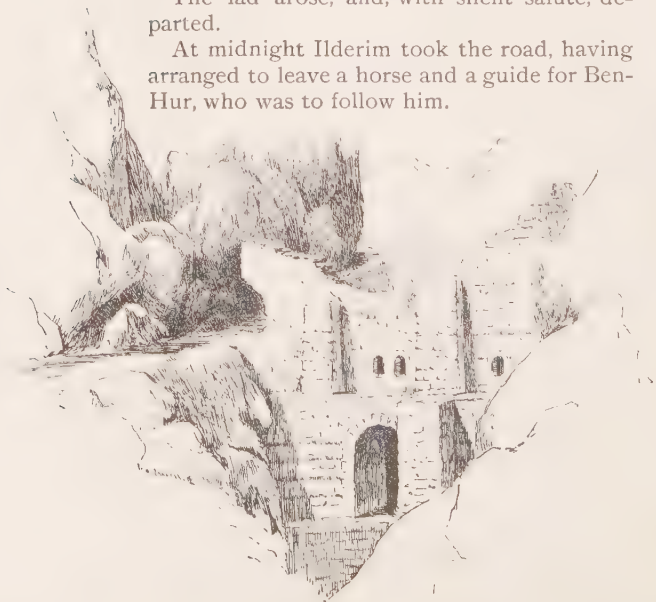
Ilderim laughed, and said, "Shall not a man enjoy his youth?"

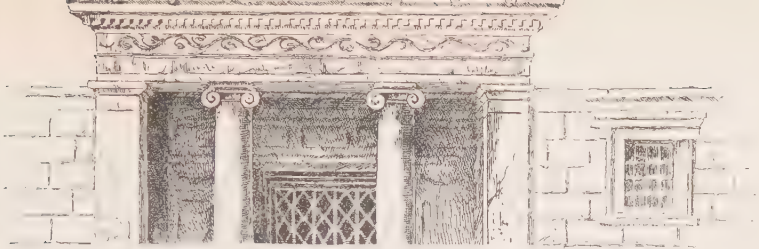
Then Ben-Hur answered the messenger.

"Say to her who sent you that I, Ben-Hur, will see her at the palace of Idernee, wherever that may be, to-morrow at noon."

The lad arose, and, with silent salute, departed.

At midnight Ilderim took the road, having arranged to leave a horse and a guide for Ben-Hur, who was to follow him.





CHAPTER XVI

IN THE PALACE OF IDERNEE

OING next day to fill his appointment with Iras, Ben-Hur turned from the Omphalus, which was in the heart of the city, into the Colonnade of Herod, and came shortly to the palace of Idernee.

From the street he passed first into a vestibule, on the sides of which were stair-ways under cover, leading up to a portico. Winged lions sat by the stairs; in the middle there was a gigantic ibis spouting water over the floor; the lions, ibis, wall, and floor were reminders of the Egyptians: everything, even the balustrading of the stairs, was of massive gray stone.

Above the vestibule, and covering the landing of the steps, arose the portico, a pillared grace, so light, so exquisitely proportioned, it was at that period hardly possible of conception except by a Greek. Of marble snowy white, its effect was that of a lily dropped carelessly upon a great bare rock.

Ben-Hur paused in the shade of the portico to admire its tracery and finish, and the purity of its marble; then he passed on into the palace. Ample folding-doors stood open to receive him. The passage into which he first entered was high, but somewhat narrow; red tiling formed the floor, and the walls were

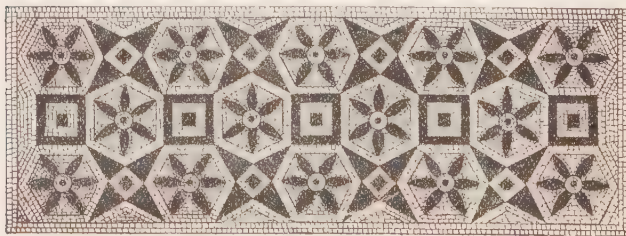
tinted to correspond. Yet this plainness was a warning of something beautiful to come.

He moved on slowly, all his faculties in repose. Presently he would be in the presence of Iras; she was waiting for him; waiting with song and story and badinage, sparkling, fanciful, capricious—with smiles which glorified her glance, and glances which lent voluptuous suggestion to her whisper. She had sent for him the evening of the boat-ride on the lake in the Orchard of Palms; she had sent for him now; and he was going to her in the beautiful palace of Idernee. He was happy and dreamful rather than thoughtless.

The passage brought him to a closed door, in front of which he paused; and, as he did so, the broad leaves began to open of themselves, without creak or sound of lock or latch, or touch of foot or finger. The singularity was lost in the view that broke upon him.

Standing in the shade of the dull passage, and looking through the door-way, he beheld the atrium of a Roman house, roomy and rich to a fabulous degree of magnificence.

How large the chamber was cannot be stated, because of the deceit there is in exact proportions; its depth was vista-like, something never to be said of an equal interior. When he stopped to make survey, and looked down upon the floor, he was standing upon the breast of a Leda, represented as caressing a swan; and, looking farther, he saw the whole floor was similarly laid in mosaic pictures of mythological subjects. And there were stools and

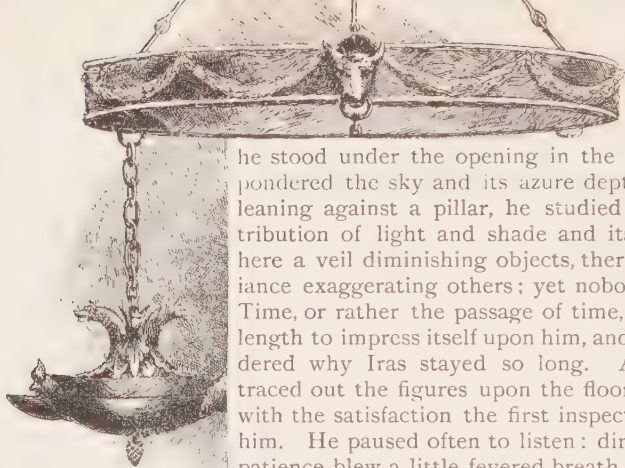


chairs, each a separate design, and a work of art exquisitely composed, and tables much carven, and here and there couches which were invitations of themselves. The articles of furniture, which stood out from the walls, were duplicated on the floor distinctly as if they floated upon unrippled water; even the panning of the walls, the figures upon them in painting and bass-relief, and the fresco of the ceiling were reflected on the floor. The ceiling curved up towards the centre, where there was an opening through which the sunlight poured without hinderance, and the sky, ever so blue, seemed in hand-reach; the impluvium under the opening was guarded by bronzed rails; the gilded pillars supporting the roof at the edges of the opening shone like flame where the sun struck them, and their reflections beneath seemed to stretch to infinite depth. And there were candelabra quaint and curious, and statuary and vases; the whole making an interior that would have befitted well the house on the Palatine Hill which Cicero bought of Crassus, or that other, yet more famous for extravagance, the Tusculan villa of Scaurus.

Still in his dreamful mood, Ben-Hur sauntered about, charmed by all he beheld, and waiting. He did not mind a little delay; when Iras was ready, she would come or send a servant. In every well-regulated Roman house the atrium was the reception chamber for visitors.

Twice, thrice, he made the round. As often





he stood under the opening in the roof, and pondered the sky and its azure depth; then, leaning against a pillar, he studied the distribution of light and shade and its effects; here a veil diminishing objects, there a brilliance exaggerating others; yet nobody came. Time, or rather the passage of time, began at length to impress itself upon him, and he wondered why Iras stayed so long. Again he traced out the figures upon the floor, but not with the satisfaction the first inspection gave him. He paused often to listen: directly impatience blew a little fevered breath upon his spirit; next time it blew stronger and hotter; and at last he woke to a consciousness of the silence which held the house in thrall, and the thought of it made him uneasy and distrustful. Still he put the feeling off with a smile and a promise. "Oh, she is giving the last touch to her eyelids, or she is arranging a chaplet for me; she will come presently, more beautiful of the delay!" He sat down then to admire a candelabrum—a bronze plinth on rollers, filigree on the sides and edges; the post at one end, and on the end opposite it an altar and a female celebrant; the lamp-rests swinging by delicate chains from the extremities of drooping palm-branches; altogether a wonder in its way. But the silence would obtrude itself: he listened even as he looked at the pretty object—he listened, but there was not a sound; the palace was still as a tomb.

There might be a mistake. No, the messenger had come from the Egyptian, and this was

the palace of Idernee. Then he remembered how mysteriously the door had opened, so soundlessly, so of itself. He would see!

He went to the same door. Though he walked ever so lightly, the sound of his stepping was loud and harsh, and he shrank from it. He was getting nervous. The cumbrous Roman lock resisted his first effort to raise it; and the second—the blood chilled in his cheeks—he wrenched with all his might: in vain—the door was not even shaken. A sense of danger seized him, and for a moment he stood irresolute.

Who in Antioch had the motive to do him harm?

Messala!

And this palace of Idernee? He had seen Egypt in the vestibule, Athens in the snowy portico; but here, in the atrium, was Rome; everything about him betrayed Roman ownership. True, the site was on the great thoroughfare of the city, a very public place in which to do him violence; but for that reason it was more accordant with the audacious genius of his enemy. The atrium underwent a change; with all its elegance and beauty, it was no more than a trap. Apprehension always paints in black.

The idea irritated Ben-Hur.

There were many doors on the right and left of the atrium, leading, doubtless, to sleeping-chambers; he tried them, but they were all firmly fastened. Knocking might bring response. Ashamed to make outcry, he betook



himself to a couch, and, lying down, tried to reflect.

All too plainly he was a prisoner; but for what purpose? and by whom?

If the work were Messala's! He sat up, looked about, and smiled defiantly. There were weapons in every table. But birds had been starved in golden cages; not so would he—the couches would serve him as battering-rams; and he was strong, and there was such increase of might in rage and despair!

Messala himself could not come. He would never walk again; he was a cripple like Simonides; still he could move others. And where were there not others to be moved by him? Ben-Hur arose, and tried the doors again. Once he called out; the room echoed so that he was startled. With such calmness as he could assume, he made up his mind to wait a time before attempting to break a way out.

In such a situation the mind has its ebb and flow of disquiet, with intervals of peace between. At length—how long, though, he could not have said—he came to the conclusion that the affair was an accident or mistake. The palace certainly belonged to somebody; it must have care and keeping; and the keeper would come; the evening or the night would bring him. Patience!

So concluding, he waited.

Half an hour passed—a much longer period to Ben-Hur—when the door which had admitted him opened and closed noiselessly as before, and without attracting his attention.



The moment of the occurrence he was sitting at the farther end of the room. A foot-step startled him.

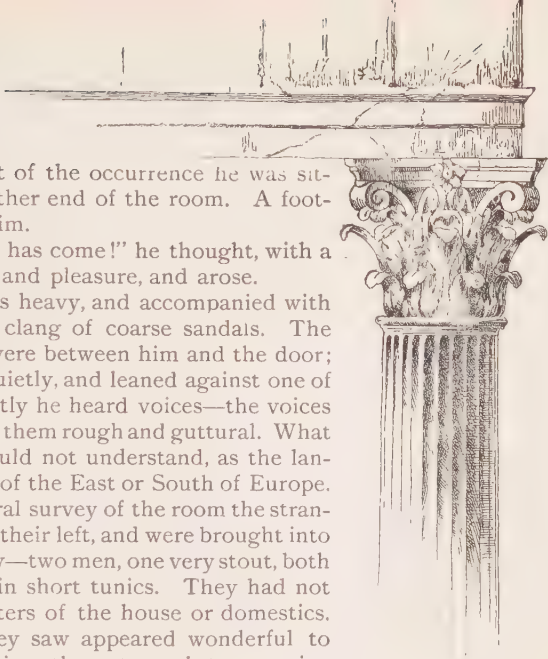
"At last she has come!" he thought, with a throb of relief and pleasure, and arose.

The step was heavy, and accompanied with the gride and clang of coarse sandals. The gilded pillars were between him and the door; he advanced quietly, and leaned against one of them. Presently he heard voices—the voices of men—one of them rough and guttural. What was said he could not understand, as the language was not of the East or South of Europe.

After a general survey of the room the strangers crossed to their left, and were brought into Ben-Hur's view—two men, one very stout, both tall, and both in short tunics. They had not the air of masters of the house or domestics. Everything they saw appeared wonderful to them; everything they stopped to examine they touched. They were vulgarians. The atrium seemed profaned by their presence. At the same time their leisurely manner and the assurance with which they proceeded pointed to some right or business; if business, with whom?

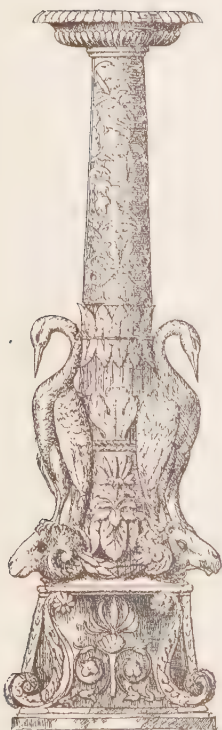
With much jargon they sauntered this way and that, all the time gradually approaching the pillar by which Ben-Hur was standing. Off a little way, where a slanted gleam of the sun fell with a glare upon the mosaic of the floor, there was a statue which attracted their notice. In examining it they stopped in the light.

The mystery surrounding his own presence in



the palace tended, as we have seen, to make Ben-Hur nervous; so now, when in the tall, stout stranger he recognized the Northman whom he had known in Rome, and seen crowned only the day before in the Circus as the winning pugilist; when he saw the man's face, scarred with the wounds of many battles, and imbruted by ferocious passions; when he surveyed the fellow's naked limbs, very marvels of exercise and training, and his shoulders of Herculean breadth, a thought of personal danger started a chill along every vein. A sure instinct warned him that the opportunity for murder was too perfect to have come by chance; and here now were the myrmidons, and their business was with him. He turned an anxious eye upon the Northman's comrade— young, black-eyed, black-haired, and altogether Jewish in appearance; he observed, also, that both the men were in costume exactly such as professionals of their class were in the habit of wearing in the arena. Putting the several circumstances together, Ben-Hur could not be longer in doubt: he had been lured into the palace with design. Out of reach of aid, in this splendid privacy, he was to die!

At a loss what to do, he gazed from man to man, while there was enacted within him that miracle of mind by which life is passed before us in awful detail, to be looked at by ourselves as if it were another's; and from the evolution, from a hidden depth, cast up, as it were, by a hidden hand, he was given to see that he had entered upon a new life, different from the



old one in this: whereas, in that, he had been the victim of violences done to him, henceforth he was to be the aggressor. Only yesterday he had found his first victim! To the purely Christian nature the presentation would have brought the weakness of remorse. Not so with Ben-Hur; his spirit had its emotions from the teachings of the first law-giver, not the last and greatest one. He had dealt punishment, not wrong, to Messala. By permission of the Lord, he had triumphed; and he derived faith from the circumstance—faith the source of all rational strength, especially strength in peril.

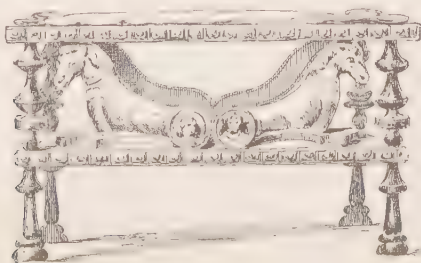
Nor did the influence stop there. The new life was made appear to him a mission just begun, and holy as the King to come was holy, and certain as the coming of the King was certain—a mission in which force was lawful if only because it was unavoidable. Should he, on the very threshold of such an errand, be afraid?

He undid the sash around his waist, and, baring his head and casting off his white Jewish gown, stood forth in an undertunic not unlike those of the enemy, and was ready, body and mind. Folding his arms, he placed his back against the pillar, and calmly waited.

The examination of the statue was brief. Directly the Northman turned, and said something in the unknown tongue; then both looked at Ben-Hur. A few more words, and they advanced towards him.

"Who are you?" he asked in Latin.

The Northman fetched a smile which did



not relieve his face of its brutalism, and answered,

"Barbarians."

"This is the palace of Idernee. Whom seek you? Stand and answer."

The words were spoken with earnestness. The strangers stopped; and in his turn the Northman asked, "Who are you?"

"A Roman."

The giant laid his head back upon his shoulders.

"Ha, ha, ha! I have heard how a god once came from a cow licking a salted stone; but not even a god can make a Roman of a Jew."

The laugh over, he spoke to his companion again, and they moved nearer.

"Hold!" said Ben-Hur, quitting the pillar. "One word."

They stopped again.

"A word!" replied the Saxon, folding his immense arms across his breast, and relaxing the menace beginning to blacken his face. "A word! Speak."

"You are Thord the Northman."

The giant opened his blue eyes.

"You were lanista in Rome."

Thord nodded.

"I was your scholar."

"No," said Thord, shaking his head. "By the beard of Irmin, I had never a Jew to make a fighting-man of."

"But I will prove my saying."

"How?"

"You came here to kill me."



"That is true."

"Then let this man fight me singly, and I will make the proof on his body."

A gleam of humor shone in the Northman's face. He spoke to his companion, who made answer; then he replied with the naïveté of a diverted child,

"Wait till I say begin."

By repeated touches of his foot, he pushed a couch out on the floor, and proceeded leisurely to stretch his burly form upon it; when perfectly at ease, he said, simply, "Now begin."

Without ado, Ben-Hur walked to his antagonist.

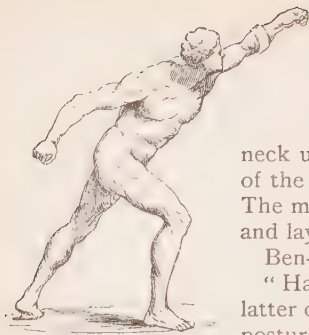
"Defend thyself," he said.

The man, nothing loath, put up his hands.

As the two thus confronted each other in approved position, there was no discernible inequality between them; on the contrary, they were as like as brothers. To the stranger's confident smile, Ben-Hur opposed an earnestness which, had his skill been known, would have been accepted fair warning of danger. Both knew the combat was to be mortal.

Ben-Hur feinted with his right hand. The stranger warding, slightly advancing his left arm. Ere he could return to guard, Ben-Hur caught him by the wrist in a grip which years at the oar had made terrible as a vice. The surprise was complete, and no time given. To throw himself forward; to push the arm across the man's throat and over his right shoulder, and turn him left side front; to strike surely with the ready left hand; to strike the bare





neck under the ear—were but petty divisions of the same act. No need of a second blow. The myrmidon fell heavily, and without a cry, and lay still.

Ben-Hur turned to Thord.

“Ha! What! By the beard of Irmin!” the latter cried, in astonishment, rising to a sitting posture. Then he laughed.

“Ha, ha, ha! I could not have done it better myself.”

He viewed Ben-Hur coolly from head to foot, and, rising, faced him with undisguised admiration.

“It was my trick—the trick I have practised for ten years in the schools of Rome. You are not a Jew. Who are you?”

“You knew Arrius the duumvir?”

“Quintus Arrius? Yes, he was my patron.”

“He had a son.”

“Yes,” said Thord, his battered features lighting dully. “I knew the boy; he would have made a king gladiator. Cæsar offered him his patronage. I taught him the very trick you played on this one here—a trick impossible except to a hand and arm like mine. It has won me many a crown.”

“I am that son of Arrius.”

Thord drew nearer, and viewed him carefully; then his eyes brightened with genuine pleasure, and, laughing, he held out his hand.

“Ha, ha, ha! He told me I would find a Jew here—a Jew—a dog of a Jew—killing whom was serving the gods.”



CEDARS OF LEBANON

"Who told you so?" asked Ben-Hur, taking the hand.

"He—Messala—ha, ha, ha!"

"When, Thord?"

"Last night."

"I thought he was hurt."

"He will never walk again. On his bed he told me between groans."

A very vivid portrayal of hate in a few words; and Ben-Hur saw that the Roman, if he lived, would still be capable and dangerous, and follow him unrelentingly. Revenge remained to sweeten the ruined life; therefore the clinging to fortune lost in the wager with Sanballat. Ben-Hur ran the ground over, with a distinct foresight of the many ways in which it would be possible for his enemy to interfere with him in the work he had undertaken for the King who was coming. Why not he resort to the Roman's methods. The man hired to kill him could be hired to strike back. It was in his power to offer higher wages. The temptation was strong; and, half yielding, he chanced to look down at his late antagonist lying still, with white upturned face, so like himself. A light came to him, and he asked, "Thord, what was Messala to give you for killing me?"

"A thousand sestertii."

"You shall have them yet; and so you do now what I tell you, I will add three thousand more to the sum."

The giant reflected aloud.

"I won five thousand yesterday; from the Roman one—six. Give me four, good Arries



—four more—and I will stand firm for you, though old Thor, my namesake, strike me with his hammer. Make it four, and I will kill the lying patrician, if you say so. I have only to cover his mouth with my hand—thus.”

He illustrated the process by clapping his hand over his own mouth.

“I see,” said Ben-Hur; “ten thousand sestertii is a fortune. It will enable you to return to Rome, and open a wine-shop near the Great Circus, and live as becomes the first of the lanistæ.”

The very scars on the giant’s face glowed afresh with the pleasure the picture gave him.

“I will make it four thousand,” Ben-Hur continued; “and in what you shall do for the money there will be no blood on your hands, Thord. Hear me now. Did not your friend here look like me?”

“I would have said he was an apple from the same tree.”

“Well, if I put on his tunic, and dress him in these clothes of mine, and you and I go away together, leaving him here, can you not get your sestertii from Messala all the same? You have only to make him believe it me that is dead.”

Thord laughed till the tears ran into his mouth.

“Ha, ha, ha! Ten thousand sestertii were never won so easily. And a wine-shop by the Great Circus!—all for a lie without blood in it! Ha, ha, ha! Give me thy hand, O son of Arrius. Get on now, and—ha, ha, ha!—if ever you come to Rome, fail not to ask for the wine-

shop of Thord the Northman. By the beard of Irmin, I will give you the best, though I borrow it from Cæsar!"

They shook hands again; after which the exchange of clothes was effected. It was arranged then that a messenger should go at night to Thord's lodging-place with the four thousand sesterii. When they were done, the giant knocked at the front door; it opened to him; and, passing out of the atrium, he led Ben-Hur into a room adjoining, where the latter completed his attire from the coarse garments of the dead pugilist. They separated directly in the Omphalus.

"Fail not, O son of Arrius, fail not the wine-shop near the Great Circus! Ha, ha, ha! By the beard of Irmin, there was never fortune gained so cheap. The gods keep you!"

Upon leaving the atrium, Ben-Hur gave a last look at the myrmidon as he lay in the Jewish vestments, and was satisfied. The likeness was striking. If Thord kept faith, the cheat was a secret to endure forever.

At night, in the house of Simonides, Ben-Hur told the good man all that had taken place in the palace of Idernee; and it was agreed that, after a few days, public inquiry should be set afloat for the discovery of the whereabouts of the son of Arrius. Eventually the matter was to be carried boldly to Maxentius; then, if the mystery came not out, it was concluded that Messala and Gratus would be at rest and happy, and Ben-Hur free to betake



himself to Jerusalem, to make search for his lost people.

At the leave-taking, Simonides sat in his chair out on the terrace overlooking the river, and gave his farewell and the peace of the Lord with the impressment of a father. Esther went with the young man to the head of the steps.

"If I find my mother, Esther, thou shalt go to her at Jerusalem, and be a sister to Tirzah."

And with the words he kissed her.

Was it only a kiss of peace?

He crossed the river next to the late quarters of Ilderim, where he found the Arab who was to serve him as guide. The horses were brought out.

"This one is thine," said the Arab.

Ben-Hur looked, and, lo! it was Aldebaran, the swiftest and brightest of the sons of Mira, and, next to Sirius, the beloved of the sheik; and he knew the old man's heart came to him along with the gift.

The corpse in the atrium was taken up and buried by night; and, as part of Messala's plan, a courier was sent off to Gratus to make him at rest by the announcement of Ben-Hur's death—this time past question.

Ere long a wine-shop was opened near the Circus Maximus, with inscription over the door:

THORD THE NORTHMAN.



BOOK

SIXTH

*"Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that woman's mate?*

*Her skin was white as leprosy,
The Nightmare life-in-Death was she,
Who thickens man's blood with cold."*

COLERIDGE.



CHAPTER I

THE TOWER OF ANTONIA—CELL NO. VI



OUR story moves forward now thirty days from the night Ben-Hur left Antioch to go out with Sheik Ilderim into the desert.

A great change has befallen—great, at least, as respects the fortunes of our hero. Valerius Gratus has been succeeded by Pontius Pilate!

The removal, it may be remarked, cost Simonides exactly five talents Roman money in hand paid to Sejanus, who was then in height of power as imperial favorite; the object being to help Ben-Hur, by lessening his exposure while in and about Jerusalem attempting discovery of his people. To such pious use the faithful servant put the winnings from Drusus and his associates; all of whom, having paid their wagers, became at once and naturally the enemies of Messala, whose repudiation was yet an unsettled question in Rome.

Brief as the time was, already the Jews knew the change of rulers was not for the better.

The cohorts sent to relieve the garrison of Antonia made their entry into the city by night; next morning the first sight that greeted the people resident in the neighborhood was the walls of the old Tower decorated with military ensigns, which unfortunately consisted of



busts of the emperor mixed with eagles and globes. A multitude, in passion, marched to Cæsarea, where Pilate was lingering, and implored him to remove the detested images. Five days and nights they beset his palace gates; at last he appointed a meeting with them in the Circus. When they were assembled, he encircled them with soldiers; instead of resisting, they offered him their lives, and conquered. He recalled the images and ensigns to Cæsarea, where Gratus, with more consideration, had kept such abominations housed during the eleven years of his reign.

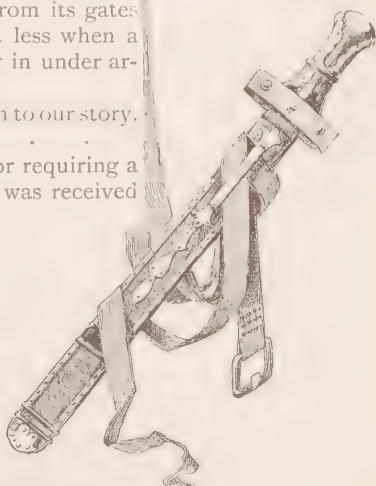
The worst of men do once in a while vary their wickednesses by good acts; so with Pilate. He ordered an inspection of all the prisons in Judea, and a return of the names of the persons in custody, with a statement of the crimes for which they had been committed. Doubtless the motive was the one so common with officials just installed—dread of entailed responsibility; the people, however, in thought of the good which might come of the measure, gave him credit, and, for a period, were comforted. The revelations were astonishing. Hundreds of persons were released against whom there were no accusations; many others came to light who had long been accounted dead; yet more amazing, there was opening of dungeons not merely unknown at the time by the people, but actually forgotten by the prison authorities. With one instance of the latter kind we have now to deal; and, strange to say, it occurred in Jerusalem.



The Tower of Antonia, which will be remembered as occupying two-thirds of the sacred area on Mount Moriah, was originally a castle built by the Macedonians. Afterwards, John Hyrcanus erected the castle into a fortress for the defence of the Temple, and in his day it was considered impregnable to assault; but when Herod came with his bolder genius, he strengthened its walls and extended them, leaving a vast pile which included every appurtenance necessary for the stronghold he intended it to be forever; such as offices, barracks, armories, magazines, cisterns, and last, though not least, prisons of all grades. He levelled the solid rock, and tapped it with deep excavations, and built over them; connecting the whole great mass with the Temple by a beautiful colonnade, from the roof of which one could look down over the courts of the sacred structure. In such condition the Tower fell at last out of his hands into those of the Romans, who were quick to see its strength and advantages, and convert it to uses becoming such masters. All through the administration of Gratus it had been a garrisoned citadel and underground prison terrible to revolutionists. Woe when the cohorts poured from its gates to suppress disorder! Woe not less when a Jew passed the same gates going in under arrest!

With this explanation we hasten to our story.

The order of the new procurator requiring a report of the persons in custody was received





at the Tower of Antonia, and promptly executed; and two days have gone since the last unfortunate was brought up for examination. The tabulated statement, ready for forwarding, lies on the table of the tribune in command; in five minutes more it will be on the way to Pilate, sojourning in the palace up on Mount Zion.

The tribune's office is spacious and cool, and furnished in a style suitable to the dignity of the commandant of a post in every respect so important. Looking in upon him about the seventh hour of the day, the officer appears weary and impatient; when the report is despatched, he will to the roof of the colonnade for air and exercise, and the amusement to be had watching the Jews over in the courts of the Temple. His subordinates and clerks share his impatience.

In the spell of waiting a man appeared in a door-way leading to an adjoining apartment. He rattled a bunch of keys, each heavy as a hammer, and at once attracted the chief's attention.

"Ah, Gesius! come in," the tribune said.

As the new-comer approached the table behind which the chief sat in an easy-chair, everybody present looked at him, and, observing a certain expression of alarm and mortification on his face, became silent that they might hear what he had to say.

"O tribune!" he began, bending low, "I fear to tell what now I bring you."

"Another mistake—ha, Gesius?"

"If I could persuade myself it is but a mistake, I would not be afraid."

"A crime then—or, worse, a breach of duty. Thou mayst laugh at Cæsar, or curse the gods, and live; but if the offence be to the eagles—ah, thou knowest, Gesius—go on!"

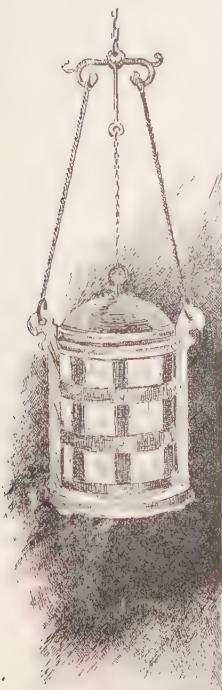
"It is now about eight years since Valerius Gratus selected me to be keeper of prisoners here in the Tower," said the man, deliberately. "I remember the morning I entered upon the duties of my office. There had been a riot the day before, and fighting in the streets. We slew many Jews, and suffered on our side. The affair came, it was said, of an attempt to assassinate Gratus, who had been knocked from his horse by a tile thrown from a roof. I found him sitting where you now sit, O tribune, his head swathed in bandages. He told me of my selection, and gave me these keys, numbered to correspond with the numbers of the cells; they were the badges of my office, he said, and not to be parted with. There was a roll of parchment on the table. Calling me to him, he opened the roll. 'Here are maps of the cells,' said he. There were three of them. 'This one,' he went on, 'shows the arrangement of the upper floor; this second one gives you the second floor; and this last is of the lower floor. I give them to you in trust.' I took them from his hand, and he said, further, 'Now you have the keys and the maps; go immediately, and acquaint yourself with the whole arrangement; visit each cell, and see to its condition. When anything is needed for the se-



curity of a prisoner, order it according to your judgment, for you are the master under me, and no other.'

"I saluted him, and turned to go away; he called me back. 'Ah, I forgot,' he said. 'Give me the map of the third floor.' I gave it to him, and he spread it upon the table. 'Here, Gesius,' he said, 'see this cell.' He laid his finger on the one numbered V. 'There are three men confined in that cell, desperate characters, who by some means got hold of a state secret, and suffer for their curiosity, which'—he looked at me severely—'in such matters is worse than a crime. Accordingly, they are blind and tongueless, and are placed there for life. They shall have nothing but food and drink, to be given them through a hole, which you will find in the wall covered by a slide. Do you hear, Gesius?' I made him answer. 'It is well,' he continued. 'One thing more which you shall not forget, or'—he looked at me threateningly—'The door of their cell—cell Number V. on the same floor—this one, Gesius'—he put his finger on the particular cell to impress my memory—'shall never be opened for any purpose, neither to let one in nor out, not even yourself.' 'But if they die?' I asked. 'If they die,' he said, 'the cell shall be their tomb. They were put there to die, and be lost. The cell is leprous. Do you understand?' With that he let me go."

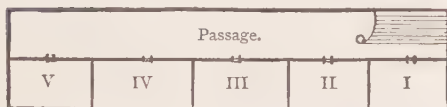
Gesius stopped, and from the breast of his tunic drew three parchments, all much yellowed by time and use; selecting one of them, he



spread it upon the table before the tribune, saying, simply, "This is the lower floor."

The whole company looked at

THE MAP.



"This is exactly, O tribune, as I had it from Gratus. See, there is cell Number V.," said Gesius.

"I see," the tribune replied. "Go on now. The cell was leprous, he said."

"I would like to ask you a question," remarked the keeper, modestly.

The tribune assented.

"Had I not a right, under the circumstances, to believe the map a true one?"

"What else couldst thou?"

"Well, it is not a true one."

The chief looked up surprised.

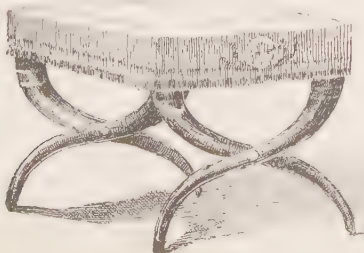
"It is not a true one," the keeper repeated.

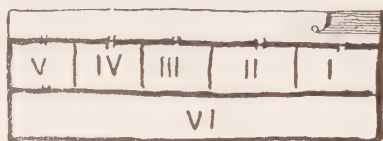
"It shows but five cells upon that floor, while there are six."

"Six, sayest thou?"

"I will show you the floor as it is—or as I believe it to be."

Upon a page of his tablets Gesius drew the following diagram, and gave it to the tribune:





"Thou hast done well," said the tribune, examining the drawing, and thinking the narrative at an end. "I will have the map corrected, or, better, I will have a new one made, and given thee. Come for it in the morning."

So saying, he arose.

"But hear me further, O tribune."

"To-morrow, Gesius, to-morrow."

"That which I have yet to tell will not wait."

The tribune good-naturedly resumed his chair.

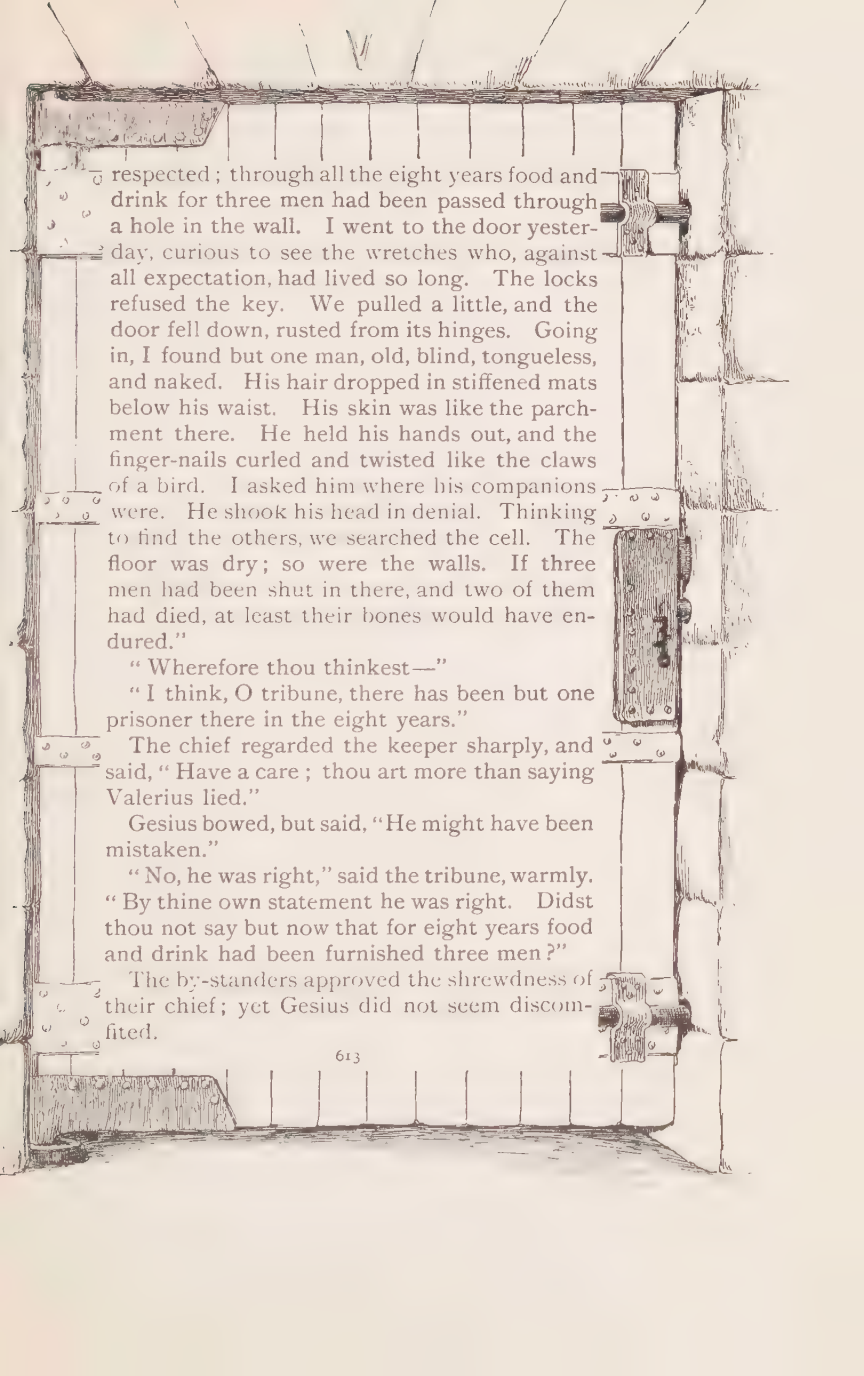
"I will hurry," said the keeper, humbly, "only let me ask another question. Had I not a right to believe Gratus in what he further told me as to the prisoners in cell Number V.?"

"Yes, it was thy duty to believe there were three prisoners in the cell—prisoners of state—blind and without tongues."

"Well," said the keeper, "that was not true either."

"No!" said the tribune, with returning interest.

"Hear, and judge for yourself, O tribune. As required, I visited all the cells, beginning with those on the first floor, and ending with those on the lower. The order that the door of Number V. should not be opened had been



respected ; through all the eight years food and drink for three men had been passed through a hole in the wall. I went to the door yesterday, curious to see the wretches who, against all expectation, had lived so long. The locks refused the key. We pulled a little, and the door fell down, rusted from its hinges. Going in, I found but one man, old, blind, tongueless, and naked. His hair dropped in stiffened mats below his waist. His skin was like the parchment there. He held his hands out, and the finger-nails curled and twisted like the claws of a bird. I asked him where his companions were. He shook his head in denial. Thinking to find the others, we searched the cell. The floor was dry ; so were the walls. If three men had been shut in there, and two of them had died, at least their bones would have endured."

"Wherefore thou thinkest—"

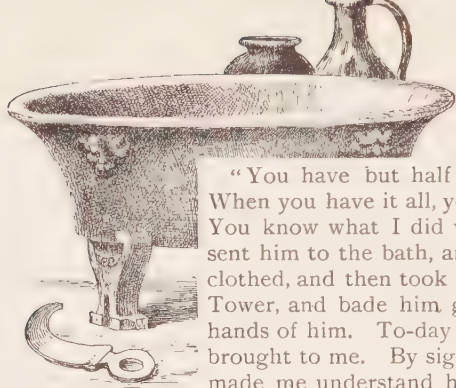
"I think, O tribune, there has been but one prisoner there in the eight years."

The chief regarded the keeper sharply, and said, "Have a care ; thou art more than saying Valerius lied."

Gesius bowed, but said, "He might have been mistaken."

"No, he was right," said the tribune, warmly. "By thine own statement he was right. Didst thou not say but now that for eight years food and drink had been furnished three men?"

The by-standers approved the shrewdness of their chief ; yet Gesius did not seem discomfited.



“You have but half the story, O tribune. When you have it all, you will agree with me. You know what I did with the man: that I sent him to the bath, and had him shorn and clothed, and then took him to the gate of the Tower, and bade him go free. I washed my hands of him. To-day he came back and was brought to me. By signs and tears he at last made me understand he wished to return to his cell, and I so ordered. As they were leading him off, he broke away and kissed my feet, and, by piteous dumb imploration, insisted I should go with him; and I went. The mystery of the three men stayed in my mind. I was not satisfied about it. Now I am glad I yielded to his entreaty.”

The whole company at this point became very still.

“When we were in the cell again, and the prisoner knew it, he caught my hand eagerly, and led me to a hole like that through which we were accustomed to pass him his food. Though large enough to push your helmet through, it escaped me yesterday. Still holding my hand, he put his face to the hole and gave a beast-like cry. A sound came faintly back. I was astonished, and drew him away, and called out, ‘Ho, here!’ At first there was no answer. I called again, and received back these words, ‘Be thou praised, O Lord!’ Yet more astonishing, O tribune, the voice was a woman’s. And I asked, ‘Who are you?’ and had reply, ‘A woman of Israel, entombed here with her daughter. Help us quickly, or we die.’

I told them to be of cheer, and hurried here to know your will."

The tribune arose hastily.

"Thou wert right, Gesius," he said, "and I see now. The map was a lie, and so was the tale of the three men. There have been better Romans than Valerius Gratus."

"Yes," said the keeper. "I gleaned from the prisoner that he had regularly given the women of the food and drink he had received."

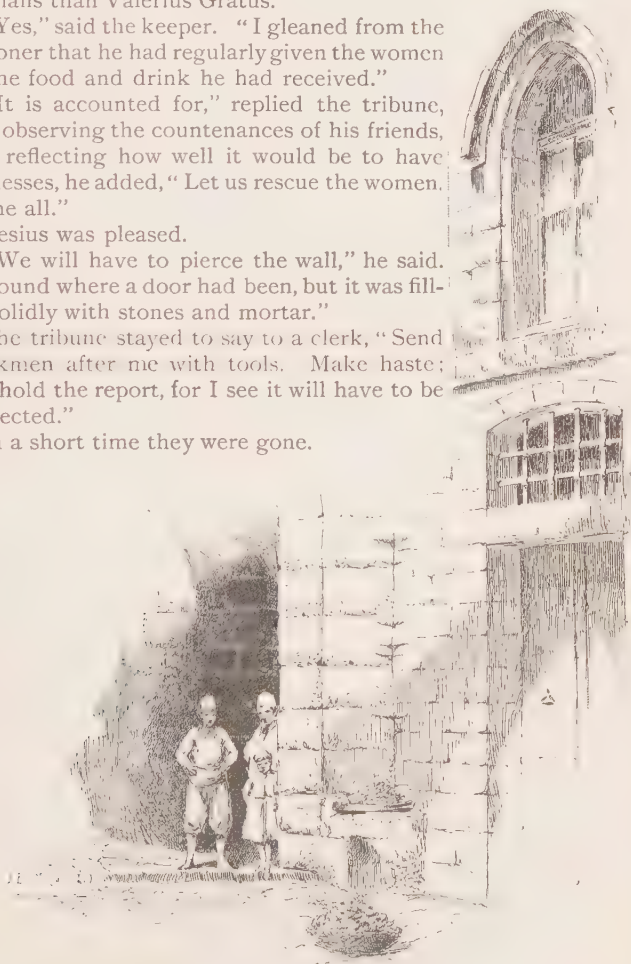
"It is accounted for," replied the tribune, and observing the countenances of his friends, and reflecting how well it would be to have witnesses, he added, "Let us rescue the women. Come all."

Gesius was pleased.

"We will have to pierce the wall," he said. "I found where a door had been, but it was filled solidly with stones and mortar."

The tribune stayed to say to a clerk, "Send workmen after me with tools. Make haste; but hold the report, for I see it will have to be corrected."

In a short time they were gone.





CHAPTER II THE LEPERS



WOMAN of Israel, entombed here with her daughter. Help us quickly, or we die."

Such was the reply Gesius, the keeper, had from the cell which appears on his amended map as VI. The reader, when he observed the answer, knew who the unfortunates were, and, doubtless, said to himself, "At last the mother of Ben-Hur, and Tirzah, his sister!"

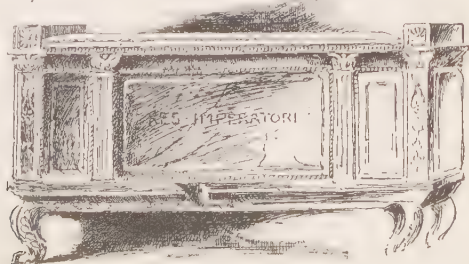
And so it was.

The morning of their seizure, eight years before, they had been carried to the Tower, where Gratus proposed to put them out of the way. He had chosen the Tower for the purpose as more immediately in his own keeping, and Cell VI. because, first, it could be better lost than any other; and, secondly, it was infected with leprosy; for these prisoners were not merely to be put in a safe place, but in a place to die. They were, accordingly, taken down by slaves in the night-time, when there were no witnesses of the deed; then, in completion of the savage task, the same slaves walled up the door, after which they were themselves separated, and sent away never to be heard of more. To save accusation, and, in the event of discovery, to leave himself such justification as might be allowed in a distinction between the

infliction of a punishment and the commission of a double murder, Gratus preferred sinking his victims where natural death was certain, though slow. That they might linger along, he selected a convict who had been made blind and tongueless, and sank him in the only connecting cell, there to serve them with food and drink. Under no circumstances could the poor wretch tell the tale or identify either the prisoners or their doomsman. So, with a cunning partly due to Messala, the Roman, under color of punishing a brood of assassins, smoothed a path to confiscation of the estate of the Hurs, of which no portion ever reached the imperial coffers.

As the last step in the scheme, Gratus summarily removed the old keeper of the prisons; not because he knew what had been done—for he did not—but because, knowing the underground floors as he did, it would be next to impossible to keep the transaction from him. Then, with masterly ingenuity, the procurator had new maps drawn for delivery to a new keeper, with the omission, as we have seen, of Cell VI. The instructions given the latter, taken with the omission on the map, accomplished the design—the cell and its unhappy tenants were all alike lost.

What may be thought of the life of the mother and daughter during the eight years must have relation to their culture and previous habits. Conditions are pleasant or grievous to us according to our sensibilities. It is not extreme to say, if there was a sudden exit of





all men from the world, heaven, as prefigured in the Christian idea, would not be a heaven to the majority; on the other hand, neither would all suffer equally in the so-called Tophet. Cultivation has its balances. As the mind is made intelligent, the capacity of the soul for pure enjoyment is proportionally increased. Well, therefore, if it be saved! If lost, however, alas that it ever had cultivation! its capacity for enjoyment in the one case is the measure of its capacity to suffer in the other. Wherefore repentance must be something more than mere remorse for sins; it comprehends a change of nature befitting heaven.

We repeat, to form an adequate idea of the suffering endured by the mother of Ben-Hur, the reader must think of her spirit and its sensibilities as much as, if not more than, of the conditions of the immurement; the question being, not what the conditions were, but how she was affected by them. And now we may be permitted to say it was in anticipation of this thought that the scene in the summer-house on the roof of the family palace was given so fully in the beginning of the Second Book of our story. So, too, to be helpful when the inquiry should come up, we ventured the elaborate description of the palace of the Hurs.

In other words, let the serene, happy, luxurious life in the princely house be recalled and contrasted with this existence in the lower dungeon of the Tower of Antonia; then if the reader, in his effort to realize the misery of the woman, persists in mere reference to conditions

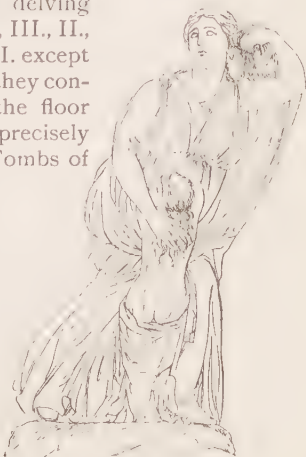
physical, he cannot go amiss; as he is a lover of his kind, tender of heart, he will be melted with much sympathy. But will he go further; will he more than sympathize with her; will he share her agony of mind and spirit; will he at least try to measure it—let him recall her as she discoursed to her son of God and nations and heroes; one moment a philosopher, the next a teacher, and all the time a mother.

Would you hurt a man keenest, strike at his self-love; would you hurt a woman worst, aim at her affections.

With quickened remembrance of these unfortunates—remembrance of them as they were—let us go down and see them as they are.

The Cell VI. was in form as Gesius drew it on his map. Of its dimensions but little idea can be had; enough that it was a roomy, roughened interior, with ledged and broken walls and floors.

In the beginning, the site of the Macedonian Castle was separated from the site of the Temple by a narrow but deep cliff somewhat in shape of a wedge. The workmen, wishing to hew out a series of chambers, made their entry in the north face of the cleft, and worked in, leaving a ceiling of the natural stone; delving farther, they executed the cells V., IV., III., II., I., with no connection with Number VI. except through Number V. In like manner, they constructed the passage and stairs to the floor above. The process of the work was precisely that resorted to in carving out the Tombs of



the Kings, yet to be seen a short distance north of Jerusalem; only when the cutting was done, cell VI. was enclosed on its outer side by a wall of prodigious stones, in which, for ventilation, narrow apertures were left bevelled like modern port-holes. Herod, when he took hold of the Temple and Tower, put a facing yet more massive upon this outer wall, and shut up all the apertures but one, which yet admitted a little vitalizing air, and a ray of light not nearly strong enough to redeem the room from darkness.

Such was Cell VI.

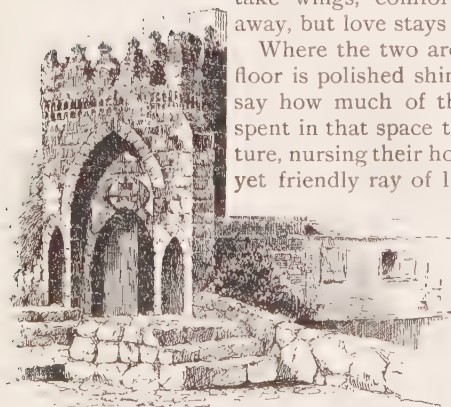
Startle not now!

The description of the blind and tongueless wretch just liberated from Cell V. may be accepted to break the horror of what is coming.

The two women are grouped close by the aperture; one is seated, the other is half-reclining against her; there is nothing between them and the bare rock. The light, slanting upward, strikes them with ghastly effect, and we cannot avoid seeing they are without vesture or covering. At the same time we are helped to the knowledge that love is there yet, for the two are in each other's arms. Riches take wings, comforts vanish, hope withers away, but love stays with us. Love is God.

Where the two are thus grouped the stony floor is polished shining-smooth. Who shall say how much of the eight years they have spent in that space there in front of the aperture, nursing their hope of rescue by that timid yet friendly ray of light? When the bright-

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ness came creeping in, they knew it was dawn; when it began to fade, they knew the world was hushing for the night, which could not be anywhere so long and utterly dark as with them. The world! Through that crevice, as if it were broad and high as a king's gate, they went to the world in thought, and passed the weary time going up and down as spirits go, looking and asking, the one for her son, the other for her brother. On the seas they sought him, and on the islands of the seas; to-day he was in this city, to-morrow in that other; and everywhere, and at all times, he was a flitting sojourner; for, as they lived waiting for him, he lived looking for them. How often their thoughts passed each other in the endless search, his coming, theirs going! It was such sweet flattery for them to say to each other, "While he lives, we shall not be forgotten; so long as he remembers us, there is hope!" The strength one can eke from little, who knows till he has been subjected to the trial?



Our recollections of them in former days enjoin us to be respectful; their sorrows clothe them with sanctity. Without going too near, across the dungeon, we see they have undergone a change of appearance not to be accounted for by time or long confinement. The mother was beautiful as a woman, the daughter beautiful as a child; not even love could say so much now. Their hair is long, unkempt, and strangely white; they make us shrink and shudder with an indefinable repulsion, though the effect may be from an illusory glossing of

the light glimmering dismally through the unhealthy murk; or they may be enduring the tortures of hunger and thirst, not having had to eat or drink since their servant, the convict, was taken away—that is, since yesterday.

Tirzah, reclining against her mother in half embrace, moans piteously.

“Be quiet, Tirzah. They will come. God is good. We have been mindful of him, and forgotten not to pray at every sounding of the trumpets over in the Temple. The light, you see, is still bright; the sun is standing in the south sky yet, and it is hardly more than the seventh hour. Somebody will come to us. Let us have faith. God is good.”

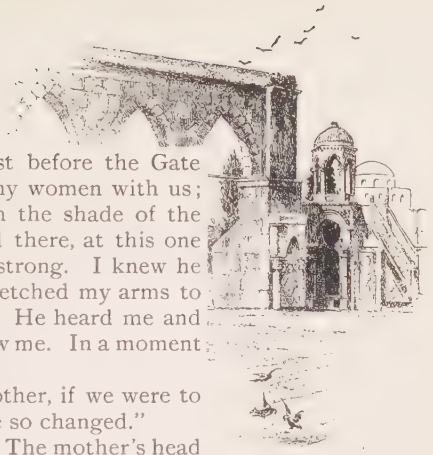
Thus the mother. The words were simple and effective, although, eight years being now to be added to the thirteen she had attained when last we saw her, Tirzah was no longer a child.

“I will try and be strong, mother,” she said. “Your suffering must be great as mine; and I do so want to live for you and my brother! But my tongue burns, my lips scorch. I wonder where he is, and if he will ever, ever find us!”

There is something in the voices that strikes us singularly—an unexpected tone, sharp, dry, metallic, unnatural.

The mother draws the daughter closer to her breast, and says, “I dreamed about him last night, and saw him as plainly, Tirzah, as I see you. We must believe in dreams, you know, because our fathers did. The Lord spoke to them so often in that way. I thought we were





in the Women's Court just before the Gate Beautiful; there were many women with us; and he came and stood in the shade of the Gate, and looked here and there, at this one and that. My heart beat strong. I knew he was looking for us, and stretched my arms to him, and ran, calling him. He heard me and saw me, but he did not know me. In a moment he was gone."

"Would it not be so, mother, if we were to meet him in fact? We are so changed."

"It might be so; but—" The mother's head droops, and her face knits as with a wrench of pain; recovering, however, she goes on—"but we could make ourselves known to him."

Tirzah tossed her arms, and moaned again.

"Water, mother, water, though but a drop."

The mother stares around in blank helplessness. She has named God so often, and so often promised in his name, the repetition is beginning to have a mocking effect upon herself. A shadow passes before her dimming the dim light, and she is brought down to think of death as very near, waiting to come in as her faith goes out. Hardly knowing what she does, speaking aimlessly, because speak she must, she says again,

"Patience, Tirzah; they are coming—they are almost here."

She thought she heard a sound over by the little trap in the partition-wall through which they held all their actual communication with the world. And she was not mistaken. A moment, and the cry of the convict rang through

the cell. Tirzah heard it also; and they both arose, still keeping hold of each other.

"Praised be the Lord forever!" exclaimed the mother, with the fervor of restored faith and hope.

"Ho, there!" they heard next; and then, "Who are you?"

The voice was strange. What matter? Except from Tirzah, they were the first and only words the mother had heard in eight years. The revulsion was mighty—from death to life—and so instantly.

"A woman of Israel, entombed here with her daughter. Help us quickly, or we die."

"Be of cheer. I will return."

The women sobbed aloud. They were found; help was coming. From wish to wish hope flew as the twittering swallows fly. They were found; they would be released. And restoration would follow—restoration to all they had lost—home, society, property, son and brother! The scanty light glossed them with the glory of day, and, forgetful of pain and thirst and hunger, and of the menace of death, they sank upon the floor and cried, keeping fast hold of each other the while.

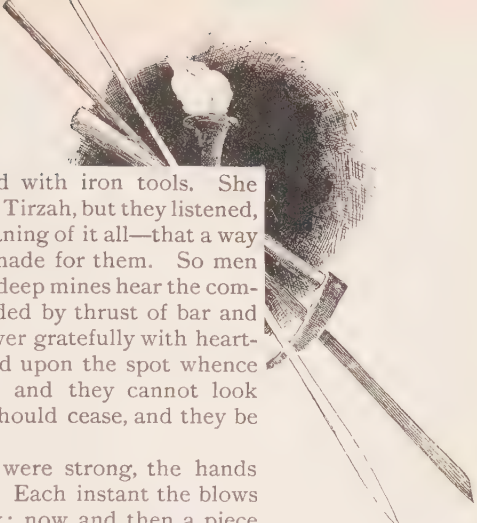
And this time they had not long to wait. Gesius, the keeper, told his tale methodically, but finished it at last. The tribune was prompt.

"Within there!" he shouted through the trap.

"Here!" said the mother, rising.

Directly she heard another sound in another place, as of blows on the wall—blows quick,





ringing, and delivered with iron tools. She did not speak, nor did Tirzah, but they listened, well knowing the meaning of it all—that a way to liberty was being made for them. So men a long time buried in deep mines hear the coming of rescuers, heralded by thrust of bar and beat of pick, and answer gratefully with heart-throbs, their eyes fixed upon the spot whence the sounds proceed; and they cannot look away, lest the work should cease, and they be returned to despair.

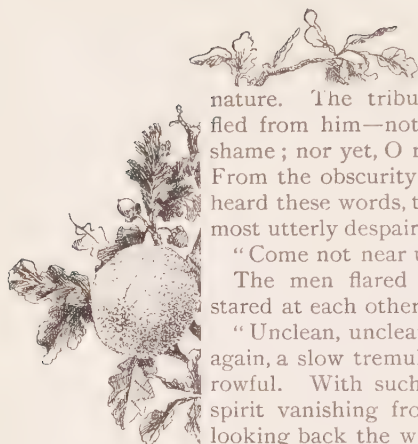
The arms outside were strong, the hands skilful, the will good. Each instant the blows sounded more plainly; now and then a piece fell with a crash; and liberty came nearer and nearer. Presently the workmen could be heard speaking. Then—O happiness!—through a crevice flashed a red ray of torches. Into the darkness it cut incisive as diamond brilliance, beautiful as if from a spear of the morning.

“It is he, mother, it is he! He has found us at last!” cried Tirzah, with the quickened fancy of youth.

But the mother answered, meekly, “God is good!”

A block fell inside, and another—then a great mass, and the door was open. A man grimed with mortar and stone-dust stepped in, and stopped, holding a torch over his head. Two or three others followed with torches, and stood aside for the tribune to enter.

Respect for women is not all a conventionality, for it is the best proof of their proper



nature. The tribune stopped, because they fled from him—not with fear, be it said, but shame; nor yet, O reader, from shame alone! From the obscurity of their partial hiding he heard these words, the saddest, most dreadful, most utterly despairing of the human tongue: “Come not near us—unclean, unclean!”

The men flared their torches while they stared at each other.

“Unclean, unclean!” came from the corner again, a slow tremulous wail, exceedingly sorrowful. With such a cry we can imagine a spirit vanishing from the gates of Paradise, looking back the while.

So the widow and mother performed her duty, and in the moment realized that the freedom she had prayed for and dreamed of, fruit of scarlet and gold seen afar, was but an apple of Sodom in the hand.

She and Tirzah were—LEPERS!

Possibly the reader does not know all the word means. Let him be told it with reference to the Law of that time, only a little modified in this.

“These four are accounted as dead—the blind, the leper, the poor, and the childless.” Thus the Talmud.

That is, to be a leper was to be treated as dead—to be excluded from the city as a corpse; to be spoken to by the best beloved and most loving only at a distance; to dwell with none but lepers; to be utterly unprivileged; to be denied the rites of the Temple and the synagogue; to go about in rent garments and with

covered mouth, except when crying, "Unclean, unclean!" to find home in the wilderness or in abandoned tombs; to become a materialized spectre of Hinnom and Gehenna; to be at all times less a living offence to others than a breathing torment to self; afraid to die, yet without hope except in death.

Once—she might not tell the day or the year, for down in the haunted hell even time was lost—once the mother felt a dry scurf in the palm of her right hand, a trifle which she tried to wash away. It clung to the member pertinaciously; yet she thought but little of the sign till Tirzah complained that she, too, was attacked in the same way. The supply of water was scant, and they denied themselves drink that they might use it as a curative. At length the whole hand was attacked; the skin cracked open, the finger-nails loosened from the flesh. There was not much pain withal, chiefly a steadily increasing discomfort. Later their lips began to parch and seam. One day the mother, who was cleanly to godliness, and struggled against the impurities of the dungeon with all ingenuity, thinking the enemy was taking hold on Tirzah's face, led her to the light, and, looking with the inspiration of a terrible dread, lo! the young girl's eyebrows were white as snow.

Oh, the anguish of that assurance!

The mother sat a while speechless, motionless, paralyzed of soul, and capable of but one thought—leprosy, leprosy!

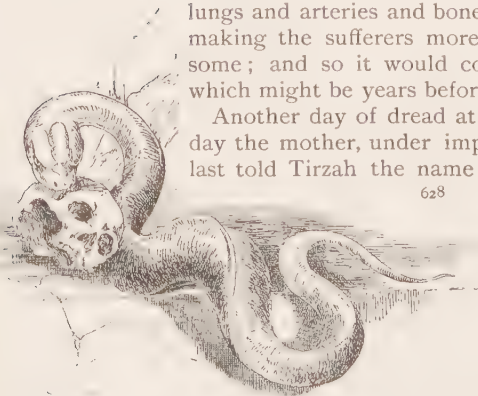
When she began to think, mother-like, it



was not of herself, but her child, and, mother-like, her natural tenderness turned to courage, and she made ready for the last sacrifice of perfect heroism. She buried her knowledge in her heart; hopeless herself, she redoubled her devotion to Tirzah, and with wonderful ingenuity—wonderful chiefly in its very inexhaustibility—continued to keep the daughter ignorant of what they were beset with, and even hopeful that it was nothing. She repeated her little games, and retold her stories, and invented new ones, and listened with ever so much pleasure to the songs she would have from Tirzah, while on her own wasting lips the psalms of the singing king of their race served to bring soothing of forgetfulness, and keep alive in them both the recollection of the God who would seem to have abandoned them—the world not more lightly or utterly.

Slowly, steadily, with horrible certainty, the disease spread, after a while bleaching their heads white, eating holes in their lips and eyelids, and covering their bodies with scales; then it fell to their throats, shrilling their voices, and to their joints, hardening the tissues and cartilages—slowly, and, as the mother well knew, past remedy, it was affecting their lungs and arteries and bones, at each advance making the sufferers more and more loathsome; and so it would continue till death, which might be years before them.

Another day of dread at length came—the day the mother, under impulsion of duty, at last told Tirzah the name of their ailment;



and the two, in agony of despair, prayed that the end might come quickly.

Still, as is the force of habit, these so afflicted grew in time not merely to speak composedly of their disease; they beheld the hideous transformation of their persons as of course, and in despite clung to existence. One tie to earth remained to them; unmindful of their own loneliness, they kept up a certain spirit by talking and dreaming of Ben-Hur. The mother promised reunion with him to the sister, and she to the mother, not doubting, either of them, that he was equally faithful to them, and would be equally happy of the meeting. And with the spinning and respinning of this slender thread they found pleasure, and excused their not dying. In such manner as we have seen, they were solacing themselves the moment Gesius called them, at the end of twelve hours' fasting and thirst.

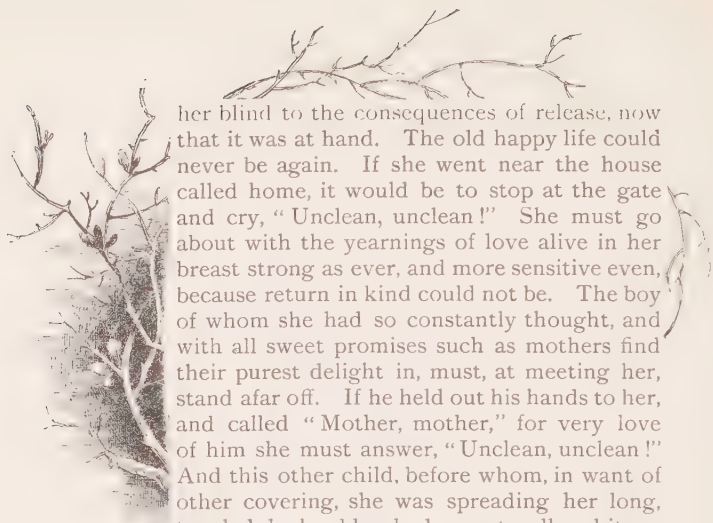
The torches flashed redly through the dungeon, and liberty was come. "God is good," the widow cried—not for what had been, O reader, but for what was. In thankfulness for present mercy, nothing so becomes us as losing sight of past ills.

The tribune came directly; then in the corner to which she had fled, suddenly a sense of duty smote the elder of the women, and straightway the awful warning—

"Unclean, unclean!"

Ah, the pang the effort to acquit herself of that duty cost the mother! Not all the selfishness of joy over the prospect could keep





her blind to the consequences of release, now that it was at hand. The old happy life could never be again. If she went near the house called home, it would be to stop at the gate and cry, "Unclean, unclean!" She must go about with the yearnings of love alive in her breast strong as ever, and more sensitive even, because return in kind could not be. The boy of whom she had so constantly thought, and with all sweet promises such as mothers find their purest delight in, must, at meeting her, stand afar off. If he held out his hands to her, and called "Mother, mother," for very love of him she must answer, "Unclean, unclean!" And this other child, before whom, in want of other covering, she was spreading her long, tangled locks, bleached unnaturally white—ah! that she was she must continue, sole partner of her blasted remainder of life. Yet, O reader, the brave woman accepted the lot, and took up the cry which had been its sign immemorially, and which thenceforward was to be her salutation without change—"Unclean, unclean!"

The tribune heard it with a tremor, but kept his place.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Two women dying of hunger and thirst. Yet"—the mother did not falter—"come not near us, nor touch the floor or the wall. Unclean, unclean!"

"Give me thy story, woman—thy name, and when thou wert put here, and by whom, and for what."

"There was once in this city of Jerusalem a Prince Ben-Hur, the friend of all generous Romans, and who had Cæsar for his friend. I am his widow, and this one with me is his child. How may I tell you for what we were sunk here, when I do not know, unless it was because we were rich? Valerius Gratus can tell you who our enemy was, and when our imprisonment began. I cannot. See to what we have been reduced—oh, see, and have pity!"

The air was heavy with the pest and the smoke of the torches, yet the Roman called one of the torch-bearers to his side, and wrote the answer nearly word for word. It was terse and comprehensive, containing at once a history, an accusation, and a prayer. No common person could have made it, and he could not but pity and believe.

"Thou shalt have relief, woman," he said, closing the tablets. "I will send thee food and drink."

"And raiment, and purifying water, we pray you, O generous Roman!"

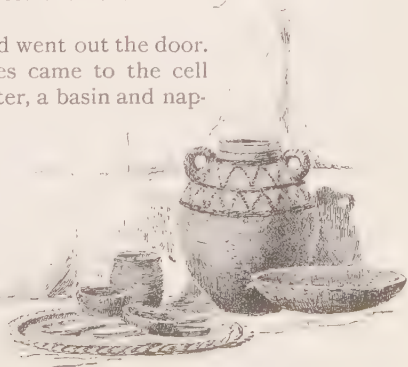
"As thou wilt," he replied.

"God is good," said the widow, sobbing. "May his peace abide with you!"

"And, further," he added, "I cannot see thee again. Make preparation, and to-night I will have thee taken to the gate of the Tower, and set free. Thou knowest the law. Farewell."

He spoke to the men, and went out the door.

Very shortly some slaves came to the cell with a large gurglet of water, a basin and nap-





kins, a platter with bread and meat, and some garments of women's wear; and, setting them down within reach of the prisoners, they ran away.

About the middle of the first watch, the two were conducted to the gate, and turned into the street. So the Roman quit himself of them, and in the city of their fathers they were once more free.

Up to the stars, twinkling merrily as of old, they looked; then they asked themselves, "What next? and where to?"

CHAPTER III JERUSALEM AGAIN



ABOUT the hour Gesius, the keeper, made his appearance before the tribune in the Tower of Antonia, a footman was climbing the eastern face of Mount Olivet. The road was rough and dusty, and vegetation on that side burned brown, for it was the dry season in Judea. Well for the traveller that he had youth and strength, not to speak of the cool, flowing garments with which he was clothed.

He proceeded slowly, looking often to his right and left; not with the vexed, anxious expression which marks a man going forward uncertain of the way, but rather the air with which one approaches an old acquaintance after a long separation—half of pleasure, half of inquiry; as if he were saying, "I am glad to be

with you again; let me see in what you are changed."

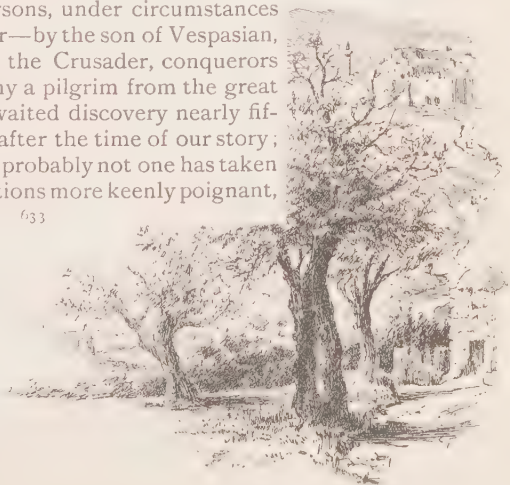
As he arose higher, he sometimes paused to look behind him over the gradually widening view terminating in the mountains of Moab; but when at length he drew near the summit, he quickened his step, unmindful of fatigue, and hurried on without pause or turning of the face. On the summit—to reach which he bent his steps somewhat right of the beaten path—he came to a dead stop, arrested as if by a strong hand. Then one might have seen his eyes dilate, his cheeks flush, his breath quicken, effects all of one bright, sweeping glance at what lay before him.

The traveller, good reader, was no other than Ben-Hur; the spectacle Jerusalem.

Not the Holy City of to-day, but the Holy City as left by Herod—the Holy City of the Christ. Beautiful yet, as seen from old Olivet, what must it have been then?

Ben-Hur betook him to a stone and sat down, and, stripping his head of the close white handkerchief which served it for covering, made the survey at leisure.

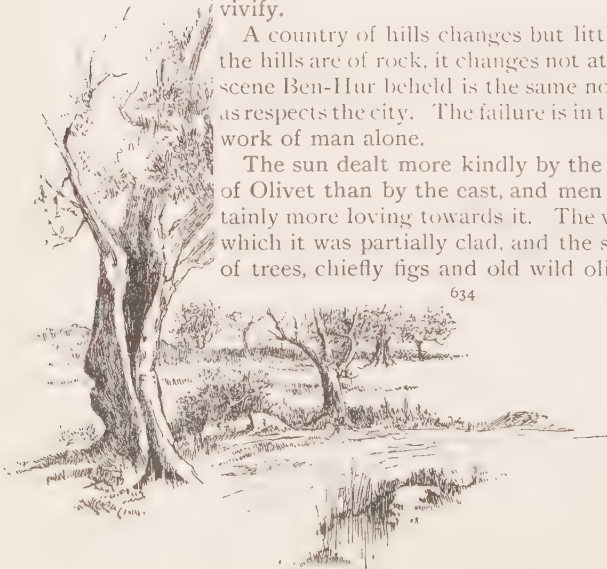
The same has been done often since by a great variety of persons, under circumstances surpassingly singular—by the son of Vespasian, by the Islamite, by the Crusader, conquerors all of them; by many a pilgrim from the great New World, which waited discovery nearly fifteen hundred years after the time of our story; but of the multitude probably not one has taken that view with sensations more keenly poignant,



more sadly sweet, more proudly bitter, than Ben-Hur. He was stirred by recollections of his countrymen, their triumphs and vicissitudes, their history the history of God. The city was of their building, at once a lasting testimony of their crimes and devotion, their weakness and genius, their religion and their irreligion. Though he had seen Rome to familiarity, he was gratified. The sight filled a measure of pride which would have made him drunk with vainglory but for the thought, princely as the property was, it did not any longer belong to his countrymen; the worship in the Temple was by permission of strangers; the hill where David dwelt was a marbled cheat—an office in which the chosen of the Lord were wrung and wrung for taxes, and scourged for very deathlessness of faith. These, however, were pleasures and griefs of patriotism common to every Jew of the period; in addition, Ben-Hur brought with him a personal history which would not out of mind for other consideration whatever, which the spectacle served only to freshen and vivify.

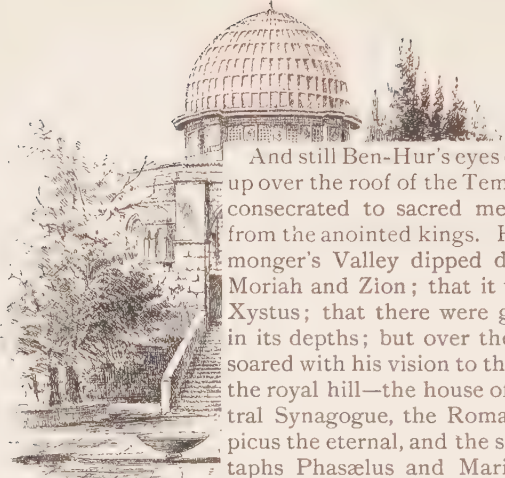
A country of hills changes but little; where the hills are of rock, it changes not at all. The scene Ben-Hur beheld is the same now, except as respects the city. The failure is in the handiwork of man alone.

The sun dealt more kindly by the west side of Olivet than by the east, and men were certainly more loving towards it. The vines with which it was partially clad, and the sprinkling of trees, chiefly figs and old wild olives, were





comparatively green. Down to the dry bed of the Cedron the verdure extended, a refreshment to the vision; there Olivet ceased and Moriah began—a wall of bluff boldness, white as snow, founded by Solomon, completed by Herod. Up, up the wall the eye climbed course by course of the ponderous rocks composing it—up to Solomon's Porch, which was as the pedestal of the monument, the hill being the plinth. Lingered there a moment, the eye resumed its climbing, going next to the Gentiles' Court, then to the Israelites' Court, then to the Women's Court, then to the Court of the Priests, each a pillared tier of white marble, one above the other in terraced retrocession; over them all a crown of crowns infinitely sacred, infinitely beautiful, majestic in proportions, effulgent with beaten gold—lo! the Tent, the Tabernacle, the Holy of Holies. The Ark was not there, but Jehovah was—in the faith of every child of Israel he was there a personal Presence. As a temple, as a monument, there was nowhere anything of man's building to approach that superlative apparition. Now, not a stone of it remains above another. Who shall rebuild that building? When shall the rebuilding be begun? So asks every pilgrim who has stood where Ben-Hur was—he asks, knowing the answer is in the bosom of God, whose secrets are not least marvellous in their well-keeping. And then the third question, What of him who foretold the ruin which has so certainly befallen? God? Or man of God? Or—enough that the question is for us to answer.



And still Ben-Hur's eyes climbed on and up—up over the roof of the Temple, to the hill Zion, consecrated to sacred memories, inseparable from the anointed kings. He knew the Cheese-monger's Valley dipped deep down between Moriah and Zion; that it was spanned by the Xystus; that there were gardens and palaces in its depths; but over them all his thoughts soared with his vision to the great grouping on the royal hill—the house of Caiaphas, the Central Synagogue, the Roman Prætorium, Hippicus the eternal, and the sad but mighty cenotaphs Phasælus and Mariamne—all relieved against Gareb, purpling in the distance. And when midst them he singled out the palace of Herod, what could he but think of the King Who Was Coming, to whom he was himself devoted, whose path he had undertaken to smooth, whose empty hands he dreamed of filling? And forward ran his fancy to the day the new King should come to claim his own and take possession of it—of Moriah and its Temple; of Zion and its towers and palaces; of Antonia, frowning darkly there just to the right of the Temple; of the new unwall'd city of Bezetha; of the millions of Israel to assemble with palm-branches and banners, to sing rejoicing because the Lord had conquered and given them the world.

Men speak of dreaming as if it were a phenomenon of night and sleep. They should know better. All results achieved by us are self-promised, and all self-promises are made in dreams awake. Dreaming is the relief of

labor, the wine that sustains us in act. We learn to love labor, not for itself, but for the opportunity it furnishes for dreaming, which is the great under-monotone of real life, unheard, unnoticed, because of its constancy. Living is dreaming. Only in the grave are there no dreams. Let no one smile at Ben-Hur for doing that which he himself would have done at that time and place under the same circumstances.

The sun stooped low in its course. Awhile the flaring disk seemed to perch itself on the far summit of the mountains in the west, brazening all the sky above the city, and rimming the walls and towers with the brightness of gold. Then it disappeared as with a plunge. The quiet turned Ben-Hur's thought homeward. There was a point in the sky a little north of the peerless front of the Holy of Holies upon which he fixed his gaze; under it, straight as a lead-line would have dropped, lay his father's house, if yet the house endured.

The mellowing influences of the evening mellowed his feelings, and, putting his ambitions aside, he thought of the duty that was bringing him to Jerusalem.

Out in the desert while with Ilderim, looking for strong places and acquainting himself with it generally, as a soldier studies a country in which he has projected a campaign, a messenger came one evening with the news that Gratus was removed, and Pontius Pilate sent to take his place.

Messala was disabled and believed him dead;



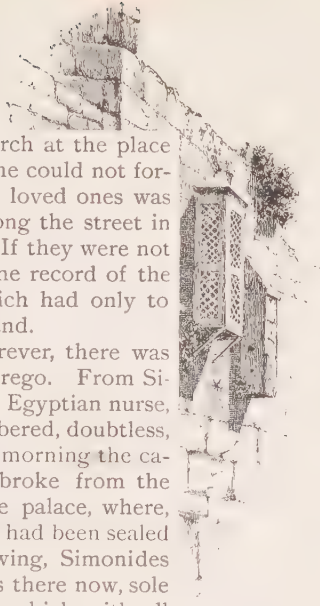
Gratus was powerless and gone ; why should Ben-Hur longer defer the search for his mother and sister ? There was nothing to fear now. If he could not himself see into the prisons of Judea, he could examine them with the eyes of others. If the lost were found, Pilate could have no motive in holding them in custody—none, at least, which could not be overcome by purchase. If found, he would carry them to a place of safety, and then, in calmer mind, his conscience at rest, this one first duty done, he could give himself more entirely to the King Who Was Coming. He resolved at once. That night he counselled with Ilderim, and obtained his assent. Three Arabs came with him to Jericho, where he left them and the horses, and proceeded alone and on foot. Malluch was to meet him in Jerusalem.

Ben-Hur's scheme, be it observed, was as yet a generality.

In view of the future, it was advisable to keep himself in hiding from the authorities, particularly the Romans. Malluch was shrewd and trusty ; the very man to charge with the conduct of the investigation.

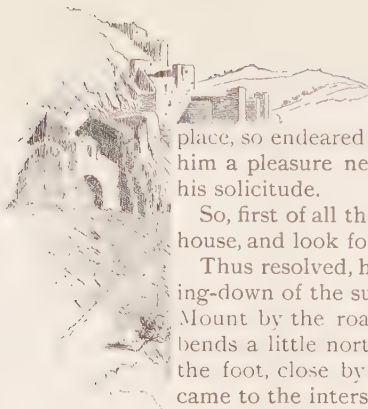
Where to begin was the first point. He had no clear idea about it. His wish was to commence with the Tower of Antonia. Tradition not of long standing planted the gloomy pile over a labyrinth of prison-cells, which, more even than the strong garrison, kept it a terror to the Jewish fancy. A burial, such as his people had been subjected to, might be possible there. Besides, in such a strait, the nat-





ural inclination is to start search at the place where the loss occurred, and he could not forget that his last sight of the loved ones was as the guard pushed them along the street in the direction to the Tower. If they were not there now, but had been, some record of the fact must remain, a clew which had only to be followed faithfully to the end.

Under this inclination, moreover, there was a hope which he could not forego. From Simonides he knew Amrah, the Egyptian nurse, was living. It will be remembered, doubtless, that the faithful creature, the morning the calamity overtook the Hurs, broke from the guard and ran back into the palace, where, along with other chattels, she had been sealed up. During the years following, Simonides kept her supplied; so she was there now, sole occupant of the great house, which, with all his offers, Gratus had not been able to sell. The story of its rightful owners sufficed to secure the property from strangers, whether purchasers or mere occupants. People going to and fro passed it with whispers. Its reputation was that of a haunted house; derived probably from the infrequent glimpses of poor old Amrah, sometimes on the roof, sometimes in a latticed window. Certainly no more constant spirit ever abided than she; nor was there ever a tenement so shunned and fitted for ghostly habitation. Now, if he could get to her, Ben-Hur fancied she could help him to knowledge which, though faint, might yet be serviceable. Anyhow, sight of her in that



place, so endeared by recollection, would be to him a pleasure next to finding the objects of his solicitude.

So, first of all things, he would go to the old house, and look for Amrah.

Thus resolved, he arose shortly after the going-down of the sun, and began descent of the Mount by the road which, from the summit, bends a little north of east. Down nearly at the foot, close by the bed of the Cedron, he came to the intersection with the road leading south to the village of Siloam and the pool of that name. There he fell in with a herdsman driving some sheep to market. He spoke to the man, and joined him, and in his company passed by Gethsemane on into the city through the Fish Gate.

CHAPTER IV

BEN-HUR AT HIS FATHER'S GATE

IT was dark when, parting with the drover inside the gate, Ben-Hur turned into a narrow lane leading to the south. A few of the people whom he met saluted him. The bowldering of the pavement was rough. The houses on both sides were low, dark, and cheerless; the doors all closed: from the roofs, occasionally, he heard women crooning to children. The loneliness of his situation, the night, the uncertainty cloaking the object of his coming, all affected him cheerlessly. With feelings sinking lower and lower, he came directly to the

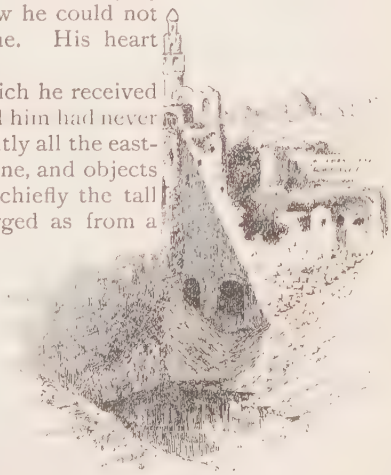
deep reservoir now known as the Pool of Bethesda, in which the water reflected the over-pending sky. Looking up, he beheld the northern wall of the Tower of Antonia, a black frowning heap reared into the dim steel-gray sky. He halted as if challenged by a threatening sentinel.

The Tower stood up so high, and seemed so vast, resting apparently upon foundations so sure, that he was constrained to acknowledge its strength. If his mother were there in living burial, what could he do for her? By the strong hand, nothing! An army might beat the stony face with ballista and ram, and be laughed at. Against him alone the gigantic south-east turret looked down in the self-containment of a hill. And he thought, cunning is so easily baffled; and God, always the last resort of the helpless—God is sometimes so slow to act!

In doubt and misgiving, he turned into the street in front of the Tower and followed it slowly on to the west.

Over in Bezetha he knew there was a khan, where it was his intention to seek lodging while in the city; but just now he could not resist the impulse to go home. His heart drew him that way.

The old formal salutation which he received from the few people who passed him had never sounded so pleasantly. Presently all the eastern sky began to silver and shine, and objects before invisible in the west—chiefly the tall towers on Mount Zion—emerged as from a



shadowy depth, and put on spectral distinctness, floating, as it were, above the yawning blackness of the valley below, very castles in the air.

He came, at length, to his father's house.

Of those who read this page, some there will be to divine his feelings without prompting. They are such as had happy homes in their youth, no matter how far that may have been back in time—homes which are now the starting-points of all recollection; paradises from which they went forth in tears, and which they would now return to, if they could, as little children; places of laughter and singing, and associations dearer than any or all the triumphs of after-life.

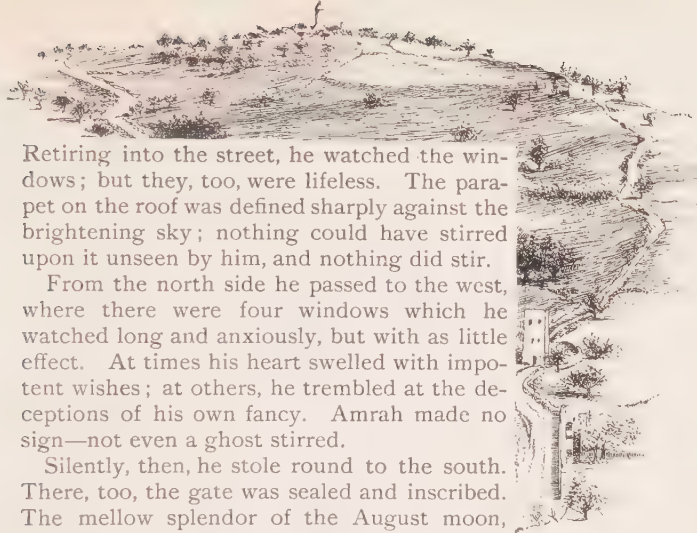
At the gate on the north side of the old house Ben-Hur stopped. In the corners the wax used in the sealing-up was still plainly seen, and across the valves was the board with the inscription—

“THIS IS THE PROPERTY OF
THE EMPEROR.”

Nobody had gone in or out the gate since the dreadful day of the separation. Should he knock as of old? It was useless, he knew; yet he could not resist the temptation. Am-rah might hear, and look out of one of the windows on that side. Taking a stone, he mounted the broad stone step, and tapped three times. A dull echo replied. He tried again, louder than before; and again, pausing each time to listen. The silence was mocking.

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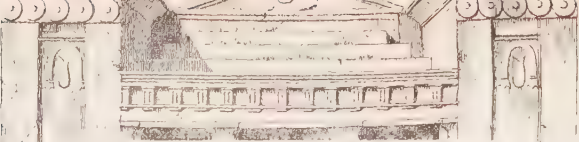
Retiring into the street, he watched the windows; but they, too, were lifeless. The parapet on the roof was defined sharply against the brightening sky; nothing could have stirred upon it unseen by him, and nothing did stir.

From the north side he passed to the west, where there were four windows which he watched long and anxiously, but with as little effect. At times his heart swelled with impotent wishes; at others, he trembled at the deceptions of his own fancy. Amrah made no sign—not even a ghost stirred.

Silently, then, he stole round to the south. There, too, the gate was sealed and inscribed. The mellow splendor of the August moon, pouring over the crest of Olivet, since termed the Mount of Offence, brought the lettering boldly out; and he read, and was filled with rage. All he could do was to wrench the board from its nailing, and hurl it into the ditch. Then he sat upon the step, and prayed for the New King, and that his coming might be hastened. As his blood cooled, insensibly he yielded to the fatigue of long travel in the summer heat, and sank down lower, and, at last, slept.

About that time two women came down the street from the direction of the Tower of Antonia, approaching the palace of the Hurs. They advanced stealthily, with timid steps, pausing often to listen. At the corner of the rugged pile, one said to the other, in a low voice,

“This is it, Tirzah!”



And Tirzah, after a look, caught her mother's hand, and leaned upon her heavily, sobbing, but silent.

"Let us go on, my child, because"—the mother hesitated and trembled; then, with an effort to be calm, continued—"because when morning comes they will put us out of the gate of the city to—return no more."

Tirzah sank almost to the stones.

"Ah, yes!" she said, between sobs; "I forgot. I had the feeling of going home. But we are lepers, and have no homes; we belong to the dead!"

The mother stooped and raised her tenderly, saying, "We have nothing to fear. Let us go on."

Indeed, lifting their empty hands, they could have run upon a legion and put it to flight.

And, creeping in close to the rough wall, they glided on, like two ghosts, till they came to the gate, before which they also paused. Seeing the board, they stepped upon the stone in the scarce cold tracks of Ben-Hur, and read the inscription—"This is the Property of the Emperor."

Then the mother clasped her hands, and, with upraised eyes, moaned in unutterable anguish.

"What now, mother? You scare me!"

And the answer was, presently, "Oh, Tirzah, the poor are dead! He is dead!"

"Who, mother?"

"Your brother! They took everything from him—everything—even this house!"

"Poor!" said Tirzah, vacantly.

"He will never be able to help us."

"And then, mother?"

"To-morrow—to-morrow, my child, we must find a seat by the way-side, and beg alms as the lepers do; beg, or—"

Tirzah leaned upon her again, and said, whispering, "Let us—let us die!"

"No!" the mother said, firmly. "The Lord has appointed our times, and we are believers in the Lord. We will wait on him even in this. Come away!"

She caught Tirzah's hand as she spoke, and hastened to the west corner of the house, keeping close to the wall. No one being in sight there, they kept on to the next corner, and shrank from the moonlight, which lay exceedingly bright over the whole south front, and along a part of the street. The mother's will was strong. Casting one look back and up to the windows on the west side, she stepped out into the light, drawing Tirzah after her; and the extent of their affliction was then to be seen—on their lips and cheeks, in their bleared eyes, in their cracked hands; especially in the long, snaky locks, stiff with loathsome ichor, and, like their eyebrows, ghastly white. Nor was it possible to have told which was mother, which daughter; both alike seemed witch-like old.

"Hist!" said the mother. "There is some one lying upon the step—a man. Let us go round him."

They crossed to the opposite side of the street



quickly, and, in the shade there, moved on till before the gate, where they stopped.

"He is asleep, Tirzah!"

The man was very still.

"Stay here, and I will try the gate."

So saying, the mother stole noiselessly across, and ventured to touch the wicket; she never knew if it yielded, for that moment the man sighed, and, turning restlessly, shifted the handkerchief on his head in such manner that the face was left upturned and fair in the broad moonlight. She looked down at it and started; then looked again, stooping a little, and arose and clasped her hands and raised her eyes to heaven in mute appeal. An instant so, and she ran back to Tirzah.

"As the Lord liveth, the man is my son—thy brother!" she said, in an awe-inspiring whisper.

"My brother?—Judah?"

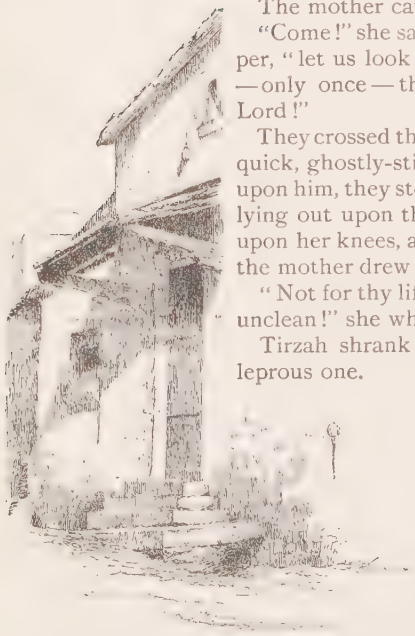
The mother caught her hand eagerly.

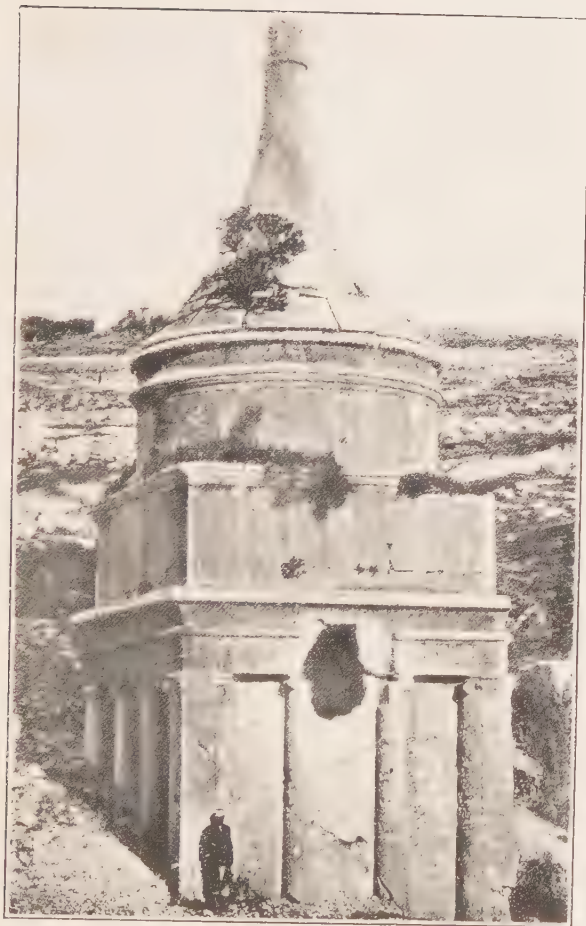
"Come!" she said, in the same enforced whisper, "let us look at him together—once more—only once—then help thou thy servants, Lord!"

They crossed the street hand in hand ghostly-quick, ghostly-still. When their shadows fell upon him, they stopped. One of his hands was lying out upon the step palm up. Tirzah fell upon her knees, and would have kissed it; but the mother drew her back.

"Not for thy life; not for thy life! Unclean, unclean!" she whispered.

Tirzah shrank from him, as if he were the leprous one.





TOMB OF ABSOLOM

Ben-Hur was handsome as the manly are. His cheeks and forehead were swarthy from exposure to the desert sun and air; yet under the light mustache the lips were red, and the teeth shone white, and the soft beard did not hide the full roundness of chin and throat. How beautiful he appeared to the mother's eyes! How mightily she yearned to put her arms about him, and take his head upon her bosom and kiss him, as had been her wont in his happy childhood! Where got she the strength to resist the impulse! From her love, O reader!—her mother-love, which, if thou wilt observe well, hath this unlikeness to any other love: tender to the object, it can be infinitely tyrannical to itself, and thence all its power of self-sacrifice. Not for restoration to health and fortune, not for any blessing of life, not for life itself, would she have left her leprous kiss upon his cheek! Yet touch him she must; in that instant of finding him she must renounce him forever! How bitter, bitter hard it was, let some other mother say! She knelt down, and, crawling to his feet, touched the sole of one of his sandals with her lips, yellow though it was with the dust of the street—and touched it again and again; and her very soul was in the kisses.

He stirred, and tossed his hand. They moved back, but heard him mutter in his dream,

“Mother! Amrah! Where is—”

He fell off into the deep sleep.

Tirzah stared wistfully. The mother put her face in the dust, struggling to suppress a sob so



deep and strong it seemed her heart was bursting. Almost she wished he might waken.

He had asked for her ; she was not forgotten ; in his sleep he was thinking of her. Was it not enough ?

Presently the mother beckoned to Tirzah, and they arose, and taking one more look, as if to print his image past fading, hand in hand they recrossed the street. Back in the shade of the wall there, they retired and knelt, looking at him, waiting for him to wake—waiting some revelation, they knew not what. Nobody has yet given us a measure for the patience of a love like theirs.

By-and-by, the sleep being yet upon him, another woman appeared at the corner of the palace. The two in the shade saw her plainly in the light ; a small figure, much bent, dark-skinned, gray-haired, dressed neatly in servant's garb, and carrying a basket full of vegetables.

At sight of the man upon the step the newcomer stopped ; then, as if decided, she walked on—very lightly as she drew near the sleeper. Passing round him, she went to the gate, slid the wicket latch easily to one side, and put her hand in the opening. One of the broad boards in the left valve swung ajar without noise. She put the basket through, and was about to follow, when, yielding to curiosity, she lingered to have one look at the stranger whose face was below her in open view.

The spectators across the street heard a low exclamation, and saw the woman rub her eyes as if to renew their power, bend closer down,



clasp her hands, gaze wildly around, look at the sleeper, stoop and raise the outlying hand, and kiss it fondly—that which they wished so mightily to do, but dared not.

Awakened by the action, Ben-Hur instinctively withdrew the hand; as he did so, his eyes met the woman's.

"Amrah! O Amrah, is it thou?" he said.

The good heart made no answer in words, but fell upon his neck crying for joy.

Gently he put her arms away, and, lifting the dark face wet with tears, kissed it, his joy only a little less than hers. Then those across the way heard him say,

"Mother—Tirzah—O Amrah, tell me of them! Speak, speak, I pray thee!"

Amrah only cried afresh.

"Thou hast seen them, Amrah. Thou knowest where they are; tell me they are at home."

Tirzah moved, but the mother, divining her purpose, caught her and whispered, "Do not go—not for life. Unclean, unclean!"

Her love was in tyrannical mood. Though both their hearts broke, he should not become what they were; and she conquered.

Meantime Amrah, so entreated, only wept the more.

"Wert thou going in?" he asked, presently, seeing the board swung back. "Come, then. I will go with thee." He arose as he spoke. "The Romans—be the curse of the Lord upon them!—the Romans lied. The house is mine. Rise, Amrah, and let us go in."

A moment and they were gone, leaving the



two in the shade to behold the gate staring blankly at them—the gate which they might not ever enter more. They nestled together in the dust.

They had done their duty.

Their love was proven.

Next morning they were found, and driven out the city with stones.

“Begone! Ye are of the dead; go to the dead!”

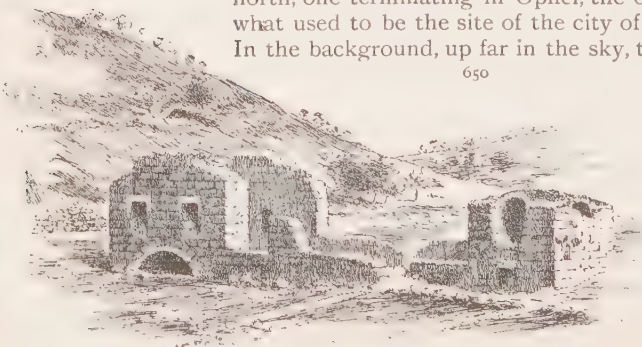
With the doom ringing in their ears, they went forth.

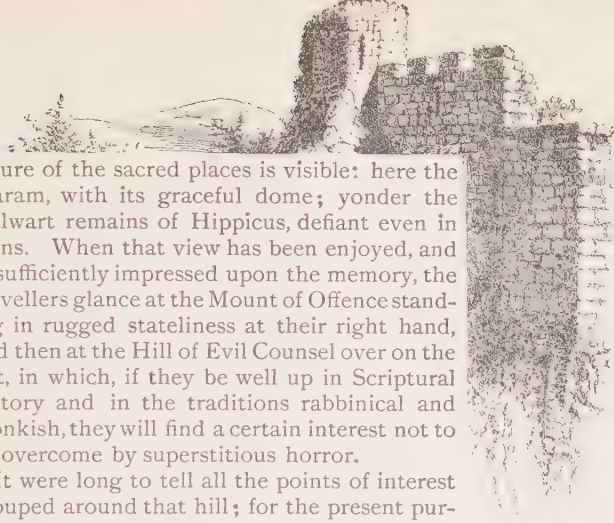
CHAPTER V

THE TOMB ABOVE THE KING'S GARDEN



OWADAYS travellers in the Holy Land looking for the famous place with the beautiful name, the King's Garden, descend the bed of the Cedron or the curve of Gihon and Hinnom as far as the old well En-rogel, take a drink of the sweet living water, and stop, having reached the limit of the interesting in that direction. They look at the great stones with which the well is curbed, ask its depth, smile at the primitive mode of drawing the purling treasure, and waste some pity on the ragged wretch who presides over it; then, facing about, they are enraptured with the mounts Moriah and Zion, both of which slope towards them from the north, one terminating in Ophel, the other in what used to be the site of the city of David. In the background, up far in the sky, the gar-





niture of the sacred places is visible: here the Haram, with its graceful dome; yonder the stalwart remains of Hippicus, defiant even in ruins. When that view has been enjoyed, and is sufficiently impressed upon the memory, the travellers glance at the Mount of Offence standing in rugged stateliness at their right hand, and then at the Hill of Evil Counsel over on the left, in which, if they be well up in Scriptural history and in the traditions rabbinical and monkish, they will find a certain interest not to be overcome by superstitious horror.

It were long to tell all the points of interest grouped around that hill; for the present purpose, enough that its feet are planted in the veritable orthodox Hell of the moderns—the Hell of brimstone and fire—in the old nomenclature Gehenna; and that now, as in the days of Christ, its bluff face opposite the city on the south and south-east is seamed and pitted with tombs which have been immemorially the dwelling-places of lepers, not singly, but collectively. There they set up their government and established their society; there they founded a city and dwelt by themselves, avoided as the accursed of God.

The second morning after the incidents of the preceding chapter, Amrah drew near the well En-rogel, and seated herself upon a stone. One familiar with Jerusalem, looking at her, would have said she was the favorite servant of some well-to-do family. She brought with her a water-jar and a basket, the contents of the latter covered with a snow-white napkin.

Placing them on the ground at her side, she loosened the shawl which fell from her head, knit her fingers together in her lap, and gazed demurely up to where the hill drops steeply down into Aceldama and the Potter's Field.

It was very early, and she was the first to arrive at the well. Soon, however, a man came bringing a rope and a leathern bucket. Saluting the little dark-faced woman, he undid the rope, fixed it to the bucket, and waited customers. Others who chose to do so might draw water for themselves; he was a professional in the business, and would fill the largest jar the stoutest woman could carry for a gerah.

Amrah sat still, and had nothing to say. Seeing the jar, the man asked after a while if she wished it filled, she answered him civilly, "Not now," whereupon he gave her no more attention. When the dawn was fairly defined over Olivet, his patrons began to arrive, and he had all he could do to attend to them. All the time she kept her seat, looking intently up at the hill.

The sun made its appearance, yet she sat watching and waiting; and while she thus waits let us see what her purpose is.

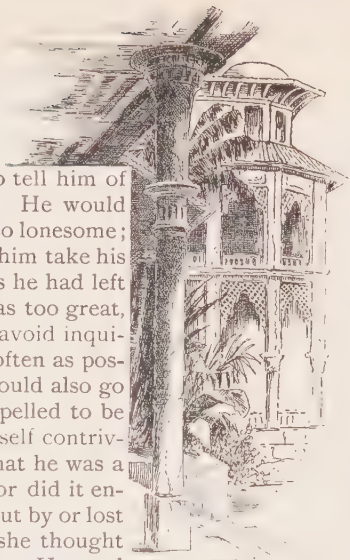
Her custom had been to go to market after nightfall. Stealing out unobserved, she would seek the shops in the Tyropœon, or those over by the Fish Gate in the east, make her purchases of meat and vegetables, and return and shut herself up again.

The pleasure she derived from the presence of Ben-Hur in the old house once more may



he imagined. She had nothing to tell him of her mistress or Tirzah—nothing. He would have had her move to a place not so lonesome; she refused. She would have had him take his own room again, which was just as he had left it; but the danger of discovery was too great, and he wished above all things to avoid inquiry. He would come and see her often as possible. Coming in the night, he would also go away in the night. She was compelled to be satisfied, and at once occupied herself contriving ways to make him happy. That he was a man now did not occur to her; nor did it enter her mind that he might have put by or lost his boyish tastes; to please him, she thought to go on her old round of services. He used to be fond of confections; she remembered the things in that line which delighted him most, and resolved to make them, and have a supply always ready when he came. Could anything be happier? So next night, earlier than usual, she stole out with her basket, and went over to the Fish Gate Market. Wandering about, seeking the best honey, she chanced to hear a man telling a story.

What the story was the reader can arrive at with sufficient certainty when told that the narrator was one of the men who had held torches for the commandant of the Tower of Antonia when, down in Cell VI., the Hurs were found. The particulars of the finding were all told, and she heard them, with the names of the prisoners, and the widow's account of herself.



The feelings with which Amrah listened to the recital were such as became the devoted creature she was. She made her purchases, and returned home in a dream. What a happiness she had in store for her boy! She had found his mother.

She put the basket away, now laughing, now crying. Suddenly she stopped and thought. It would kill him to be told that his mother and Tirzah were lepers. He would go through the awful city over on the Hill of Evil Counsel—into each infected tomb he would go without rest, asking for them, and the disease would catch him, and their fate would be his. She wrung her hands. What should she do?

Like many a one before her, and many a one since, she derived inspiration, if not wisdom, from her affection, and came to a singular conclusion.

The lepers, she knew, were accustomed of mornings to come down from their sepulchral abodes in the hill, and take a supply of water for the day from the well En-Rogel. Bringing their jars, they would set them on the ground and wait, standing afar until they were filled. To that the mistress and Tirzah must come; for the law was inexorable, and admitted no distinction. A rich leper was no better than a poor one.

So Amrah decided not to speak to Ben-Hur of the story she had heard, but go alone to the well and wait. Hunger and thirst would drive the unfortunates thither, and she believed she



could recognize them at sight ; if not, they might recognize her.

Meantime Ben-Hur came, and they talked much. To-morrow Malluch would arrive ; then the search should be immediately begun. He was impatient to be about it. To amuse himself he would visit the sacred places in the vicinity. The secret, we may be sure, weighed heavily on the woman, but she held her peace.

When he was gone she busied herself in the preparation of things good to eat, applying her utmost skill to the work. At the approach of day, as signalled by the stars, she filled the basket, selected a jar, and took the road to En-Rogel, going out by the Fish Gate which was earliest open, and arriving as we have seen.

Shortly after sunrise, when business at the well was most pressing, and the drawer of water most hurried ; when, in fact, half a dozen buckets were in use at the same time, everybody making haste to get away before the cool of the morning melted into the heat of the day, the tenantry of the hill began to appear and move about the doors of their tombs. Somewhat later they were discernible in groups, of which not a few were children so young that they suggested the holiest relation. Numbers came momentarily around the turn of the bluff — women with jars upon their shoulders, old and very feeble men hobbling along on staffs and crutches. Some leaned upon the shoulders of others ; a few—the utterly helpless—lay, like heaps of rags, upon litters. Even that



community of superlative sorrow had its love-light to make life endurable and attractive. Distance softened without entirely veiling the misery of the outcasts.

From her seat by the well Amrah kept watch upon the spectral groups. She scarcely moved. More than once she imagined she saw those she sought. That they were there upon the hill she had no doubt; that they must come down and near she knew; when the people at the well were all served they would come.

Now, quite at the base of the bluff there was a tomb which had more than once attracted Amrah by its wide gaping. A stone of large dimensions stood near its mouth. The sun looked into it through the hottest hours of the day, and altogether it seemed uninhabitable by anything living, unless, perchance, by some wild dogs returning from scavenger duty down in Gehenna. Thence, however, and greatly to her surprise, the patient Egyptian beheld two women come, one half supporting, half leading, the other. They were both white-haired; both looked old; but their garments were not rent, and they gazed about them as if the locality were new. The witness below thought she even saw them shrink terrified at the spectacle offered by the hideous assemblage of which they found themselves part. Slight reasons, certainly, to make her heart beat faster, and draw her attention to them exclusively; but so they did.

The two remained by the stone awhile; then



they moved slowly, painfully, and with much fear towards the well, whereat several voices were raised to stop them; yet they kept on. The drawer of water picked up some pebbles, and made ready to drive them back. The company cursed them. The greater company on the hill shouted shrilly, "Unclean, unclean!"

"Surely," thought Amrah of the two, as they kept coming—"surely, they are strangers, to the usage of lepers."

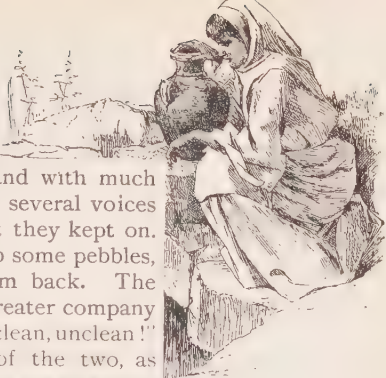
She arose, and went to meet them, taking the basket and jar. The alarm at the well immediately subsided.

"What a fool," said one, laughing; "what a fool to give good bread to the dead in that way!"

"And to think of her coming so far!" said another. "I would at least make them meet me at the gate."

Amrah, with better impulse, proceeded. If she should be mistaken! Her heart arose into her throat. And the farther she went the more doubtful and confused she became. Four or five yards from where they stood waiting for her she stopped.

That the mistress she loved! whose hand she had so often kissed in gratitude! whose image of matronly loveliness she had treasured in memory so faithfully! And that the Tirzah she had nursed through babyhood! whose pains she had soothed, whose sports she had shared! that the smiling, sweet-faced, songful Tirzah, the light of the great house, the promised blessing of her old age! Her mistress,



her darling—they? The soul of the woman sickened at the sight.

"These are old women," she said to herself. "I never saw them before. I will go back."

She turned away.

"Amrah," said one of the lepers.

The Egyptian dropped the jar, and looked back, trembling.

"Who called me?" she asked.

"Amrah."

The servant's wondering eyes settled upon the speaker's face.

"Who are you?" she cried.

"We are they you are seeking."

Amrah fell upon her knees.

"O my mistress, my mistress! As I have made your God my God, be he praised that he has led me to you!"

And upon her knees the poor overwhelmed creature began moving forward.

"Stay, Amrah! Come not nearer. Unclean, unclean!"

The words sufficed. Amrah fell upon her face, sobbing so loud the people at the well heard her. Suddenly she arose upon her knees again.

"O my mistress, where is Tirzah?"

"Here I am, Amrah, here! Will you not bring me a little water?"

The habit of the servant renewed itself. Putting back the coarse hair fallen over her face, Amrah arose and went to the basket and uncovered it.

"See," she said, "here are bread and meat."





She would have spread the napkin upon the ground, but the mistress spoke again.

"Do not so, Amrah. Those yonder may stone you, and refuse us drink. Leave the basket with me. Take up the jar and fill it, and bring it here. We will carry them to the tomb with us. For this day you will then have rendered all the service that is lawful. Haste, Amrah."

The people under whose eyes all this had passed made way for the servant, and even helped her fill the jar, so piteous was the grief her countenance showed.

"Who are they?" a woman asked.

Amrah meekly answered, "They used to be good to me."

Raising the jar upon her shoulder, she hurried back. In forgetfulness, she would have gone to them, but the cry, "Unclean, unclean! Beware!" arrested her. Placing the water by the basket, she stepped back, and stood off a little way.

"Thank you, Amrah," said the mistress, taking the articles into possession. "This is very good of you."

"Is there nothing more I can do?" asked Amrah.

The mother's hand was upon the jar, and she was fevered with thirst; yet she paused, and, rising, said firmly, "Yes, I know that Judah has come home. I saw him at the gate night before last asleep on the step. I saw you wake him."

Amrah clasped her hands.





"O my mistress! You saw it, and did not come!"

"That would have been to kill him. I can never take him in my arms again. I can never kiss him more. O Amrah, Amrah, you love him, I know!"

"Yes," said the true heart, bursting into tears again, and kneeling. "I would die for him."

"Prove to me what you say, Amrah."

"I am ready."

"Then you shall not tell him where we are or that you have seen us—only that, Amrah."

"But he is looking for you. He has come from afar to find you."

"He must not find us. He shall not become what we are. Hear, Amrah. You shall serve us as you have this day. You shall bring us the little we need—not long now—not long. You shall come every morning and evening thus, and—and"—the voice trembled, the strong will almost broke down—"and you shall tell us of him, Amrah; but to him you shall say nothing of us. Hear you?"

"Oh, it will be so hard to hear him speak of you, and see him going about looking for you—to see all his love, and not tell him so much as that you are alive!"

"Can you tell him we are well, Amrah?"

The servant bowed her head in her arms.

"No," the mistress continued; "wherefore be silent altogether. Go now, and come this evening. We will look for you. Till then, farewell!"

"The burden will be heavy, O my mistress,

and hard to bear," said Amrah, falling upon her face.

"How much harder would it be to see him as we are," the mother answered, as she gave the basket to Tirzah. "Come again this evening," she repeated; taking up the water, and starting for the tomb.

Amrah waited kneeling until they had disappeared; then she took the road sorrowfully home.

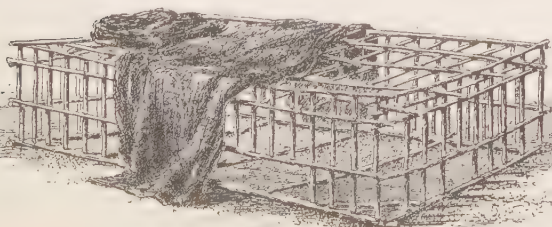
In the evening she returned; and thereafter it became her custom to serve them in the morning and evening, so that they wanted for nothing needful. The tomb, though ever so stony and desolate, was less cheerless than the cell in the Tower had been. Daylight gilded its door, and it was in the beautiful world. Then, one can wait death with so much more faith out under the open sky.

CHAPTER VI

A TRICK OF PILATE'S—THE COMBAT

THE morning of the first day of the seventh month—Tishri in the Hebrew, October in English—Ben-Hur arose from his couch in the khan ill-satisfied with the whole world.

Little time had been lost in consultation upon the arrival of Malluch. The latter began the search at the Tower of Antonia, and began it boldly, by a direct inquiry of the tribune commanding. He gave the officer a history of the



Hurs, and all the particulars of the accident to Gratus, describing the affair as wholly without criminality. The object of the quest now, he said, was if any of the unhappy family were discovered alive to carry a petition to the feet of Cæsar, praying restitution of the estate and return to their civil rights. Such a petition, he had no doubt, would result in an investigation by the imperial order, a proceeding of which the friends of the family had no fear.

In reply the tribune stated circumstantially the discovery of the women in the Tower, and permitted a reading of the memorandum he had taken of their account of themselves; when leave to copy it was prayed, he even permitted that.

Malluch thereupon hurried to Ben-Hur.

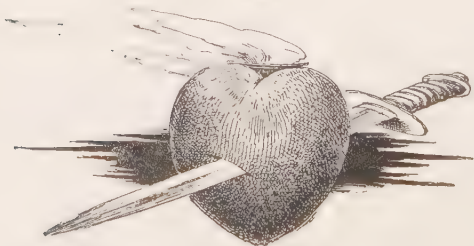
It were useless to attempt description of the effect the terrible story had upon the young man. The pain was not relieved by tears or passionate outcries; it was too deep for any expression. He sat still a long time, with pallid face and laboring heart. Now and then, as if to show the thoughts which were most poignant, he muttered,

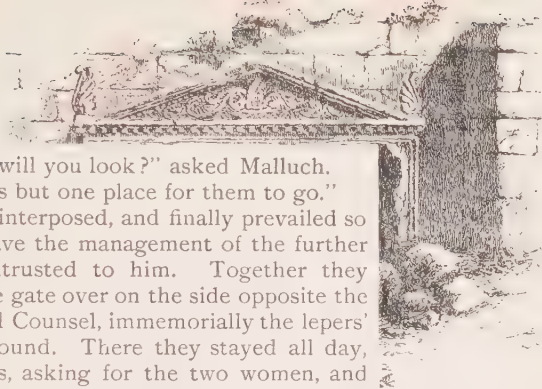
"Lepers, lepers! They—my mother and Tirzah—they lepers! How long, how long, O Lord!"

One moment he was torn by a virtuous rage of sorrow, next by a longing for vengeance which, it must be admitted, was scarcely less virtuous.

At length he arose.

"I must look for them. 'They may be dying.'"





"Where will you look?" asked Malluch.

"There is but one place for them to go."

Malluch interposed, and finally prevailed so far as to have the management of the further attempt intrusted to him. Together they went to the gate over on the side opposite the Hill of Evil Counsel, immemorially the lepers' begging-ground. There they stayed all day, giving alms, asking for the two women, and offering rich rewards for their discovery. So they did in repetition day after day through the remainder of the fifth month, and all the sixth. There was diligent scouring of the dread city on the hill by lepers to whom the rewards offered were mighty incentives, for they were only dead in law. Over and over again the gaping tomb down by the well was invaded, and its tenants subjected to inquiry; but they kept their secret fast. The result was failure. And now, the morning of the first day of the seventh month, the extent of the additional information gained was that not long before two leprous women had been stoned from the Fish Gate by the authorities. A little pressing of the clew, together with some shrewd comparison of dates, led to the sad assurance that the sufferers were the Hurs, and left the old question darker than ever. Where were they? And what had become of them?

"It was not enough that my people should be made lepers," said the son, over and over again, with what intensity of bitterness the reader may imagine; "that was not enough.



Oh, no! They must be stoned from their native city! My mother is dead! she has wandered to the wilderness! she is dead! Tirzah is dead! I alone am left. And for what? How long, O God, thou Lord God of my fathers, how long shall this Rome endure?"

Angry, hopeless, vengeful, he entered the court of the khan, and found it crowded with people come in during the night. While he ate his breakfast, he listened to some of them. To one party he was specially attracted. They were mostly young, stout, active, hardy men, in manner and speech provincial. In their look, the certain indefinable air, the pose of the head, glance of the eye, there was a spirit which did not, as a rule, belong to the outward seeming of the lower orders of Jerusalem; the spirit thought by some to be a peculiarity of life in mountainous districts, but which may be more surely traced to a life of healthful freedom. In a short time he ascertained they were Galileans, in the city for various purposes, but chiefly to take part in the Feast of Trumpets, set for that day. They became to him at once objects of interest, as hailing from the region in which he hoped to find readiest support in the work he was shortly to set about.

While observing them, his mind running ahead in thought of achievements possible to a legion of such spirits disciplined after the severe Roman style, a man came into the court, his face much flushed, his eyes bright with excitement.

"Why are you here?" he said to the Gali-

leans. "The rabbis and elders are going from the Temple to see Pilate. Come, make haste, and let us go with them."

They surrounded him in a moment.

"To see Pilate! For what?"

"They have discovered a conspiracy. Pilate's new aqueduct is to be paid for with money of the Temple."

"What, with the sacred treasure?"

They repeated the question to each other with flashing eyes.

"It is Corban—money of God. Let him touch a shekel of it if he dare!"

"Come," cried the messenger. "The procession is by this time across the bridge. The whole city is pouring after. We may be needed. Make haste!"

As if the thought and the act were one, there was quick putting away of useless garments, and the party stood forth bareheaded, and in the short sleeveless under-tunics they were used to wearing as reapers in the field and boatmen on the lake—the garb in which they climbed the hills following the herds, and plucked the ripened vintage, careless of the sun. Lingered only to tighten their girdles, they said, "We are ready."

Then Ben-Hur spoke to them.

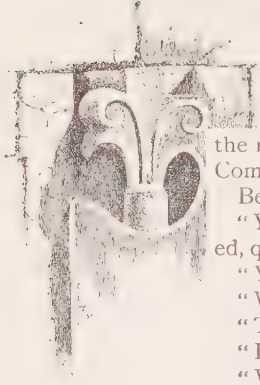
"Men of Galilee," he said, "I am a son of Judah. Will you take me in your company?"

"We may have to fight," they replied.

"Oh, then, I will not be the first to run away!"

They took the retort in good-humor, and





the messenger said, "You seem stout enough. Come along."

Ben-Hur put off his outer garments.

"You think there may be fighting?" he asked, quietly, as he tightened his girdle.

"Yes."

"With whom?"

"The guard."

"Legionaries?"

"Whom else can a Roman trust?"

"What have you to fight with?"

They looked at him silently.

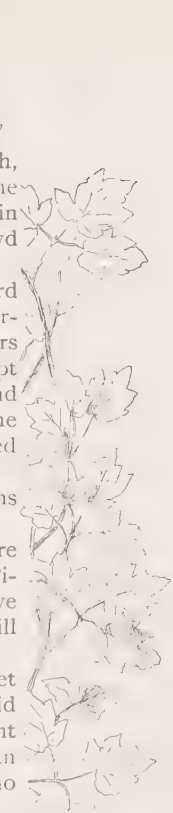
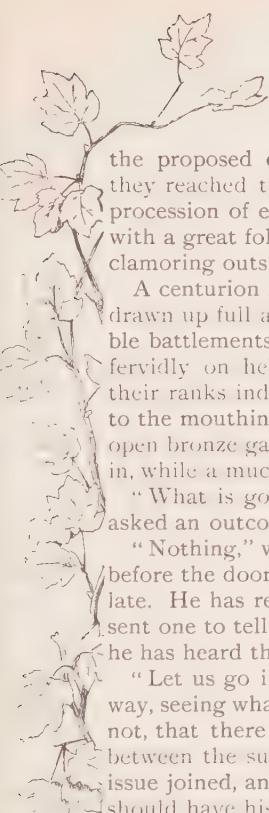
"Well," he continued, "we will have to do the best we can; but had we not better choose a leader? The legionaries always have one, and so are able to act with one mind."

The Galileans stared more curiously, as if the idea were new to them.

"Let us at least agree to stay together," he said. "Now I am ready, if you are."

"Yes, let us go."

The khan, it should not be forgotten, was in Bezetha, the new town; and to get to the Prætorium, as the Romans resonantly styled the palace of Herod on Mount Zion, the party had to cross the lowlands north and west of the Temple. By streets—if they may be so called—trending north and south, with intersections hardly up to the dignity of alleys, they passed rapidly round the Akra district to the Tower of Mariamne, from which the way was short to the grand gate of the walled heights. In going, they overtook, or were overtaken by, people like themselves stirred to wrath by news of



the proposed desecration. When, at length, they reached the gate of the Prætorium, the procession of elders and rabbis had passed in with a great following, leaving a greater crowd clamoring outside.

A centurion kept the entrance with a guard drawn up full armed under the beautiful marble battlements. The sun struck the soldiers fervidly on helm and shield; but they kept their ranks indifferent alike to its dazzle and to the mouthings of the rabble. Through the open bronze gates a current of citizens poured in, while a much lesser one poured out.

"What is going on?" one of the Galileans asked an outcomer.

"Nothing," was the reply. "The rabbis are before the door of the palace asking to see Pilate. He has refused to come out. They have sent one to tell him they will not go away till he has heard them. They are waiting."

"Let us go in," said Ben-Hur, in his quiet way, seeing what his companions probably did not, that there was not only a disagreement between the suitors and the governor, but an issue joined, and a serious question as to who should have his will.

Inside the gate there was a row of trees in leaf, with seats under them. The people, whether going or coming, carefully avoided the shade cast gratefully upon the white, clean-swept pavement; for, strange as it may seem, a rabbinical ordinance, alleged to have been derived from the law, permitted no green thing to be grown within the walls of Jerusalem.

Even the wise king, it was said, wanting a garden for his Egyptian bride, was constrained to found it down in the meeting-place of the valleys above En-Rogel.

Through the tree-tops shone the outer fronts of the palace. Turning to the right, the party proceeded a short distance to a spacious square, on the west side of which stood the residence of the governor. An excited multitude filled the square. Every face was directed towards a portico built over a broad door-way which was closed. Under the portico there was another array of legionaries.

The throng was so close the friends could not well have advanced if such had been their desire; they remained therefore in the rear, observers of what was going on. About the portico they could see the high turbans of the rabbis, whose impatience communicated at times to the mass behind them; a cry was frequent to the effect "Pilate, if thou be a governor, come forth, come forth!"

Once a man coming out pushed through the crowd, his face red with anger.

"Israel is of no account here," he said, in a loud voice. "On this holy ground we are no better than dogs of Rome."

"Will he not come out, think you?"

"Come? Has he not thrice refused?"

"What will the rabbis do?"

"As at Cæsarea—camp here till he gives them ear."

"He will not dare touch the treasure, will he?" asked one of the Galileans.





"Who can say? Did not a Roman profane the Holy of Holies? Is there anything sacred from Romans?"

An hour passed, and though Pilate deigned them no answer, the rabbis and crowd remained. Noon came, bringing a shower from the west, but no change in the situation, except that the multitude was larger and much noisier, and the feeling more decidedly angry. The shouting was almost continuous, Come forth, come forth! The cry was sometimes with disrespectful variations. Meanwhile Ben-Hur held his Galilean friends together. He judged the pride of the Roman would eventually get the better of his discretion, and that the end could not be far off. Pilate was but waiting for the people to furnish him an excuse for resort to violence.

And at last the end came. In the midst of the assemblage there was heard the sound of blows, succeeded instantly by yells of pain and rage, and a most furious commotion. The venerable men in front of the portico faced about aghast. The common people in the rear at first pushed forward; in the centre, the effort was to get out; and for a short time the pressure of opposing forces was terrible. A thousand voices made inquiry, raised all at once; as no one had time to answer, the surprise speedily became a panic.

Ben-Hur kept his senses.

"You cannot see?" he said to one of the Galileans.

"No."

"I will raise you up."

He caught the man about the middle, and lifted him bodily.

"What is it?"

"I see now," said the man. "There are some armed with clubs, and they are beating the people. They are dressed like Jews."

"Who are they?"

"Romans, as the Lord liveth! Romans in disguise. Their clubs fly like flails! There, I saw a rabbi struck down—an old man! They spare nobody!"

Ben-Hur let the man down.

"Men of Galilee," he said, "it is a trick of Pilate's. Now, will you do what I say, we will get even with the club-men."

The Galilean spirit arose.

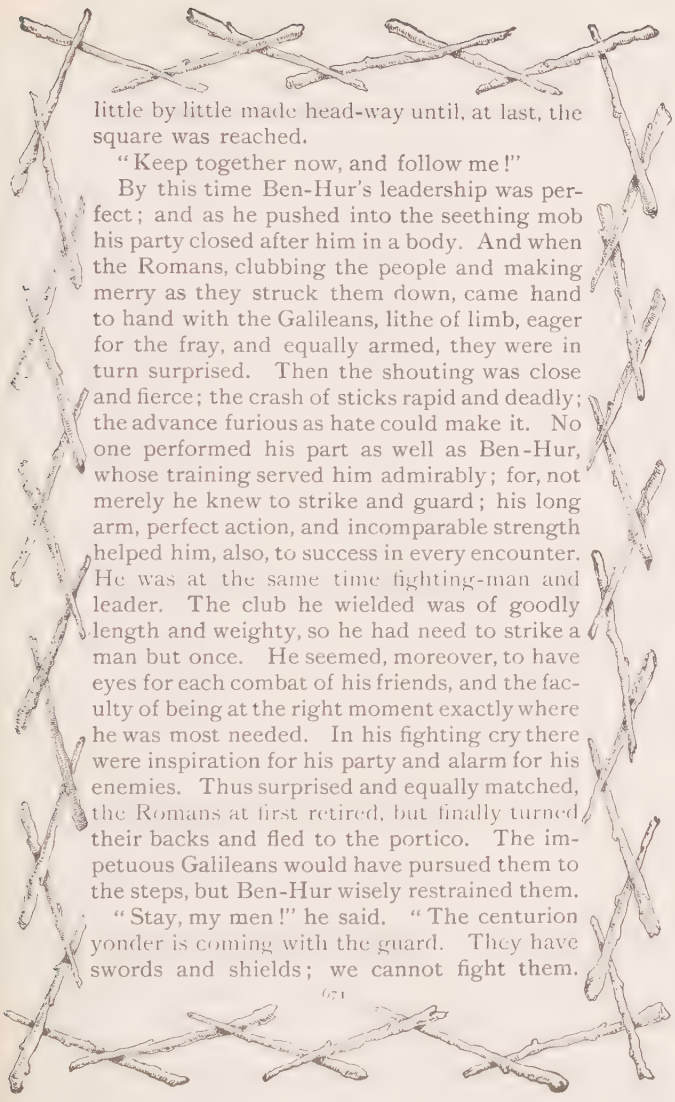
"Yes, yes!" they answered.

"Let us go back to the trees by the gate, and we may find the planting of Herod, though unlawful, has some good in it after all. Come!"

They ran back all of them fast as they could; and, by throwing their united weight upon the limbs, tore them from the trunks. In a brief time they, too, were armed. Returning, at the corner of the square they met the crowd rushing madly for the gate. Behind, the clamor continued—a medley of shrieks, groans, and execrations.

"To the wall!" Ben-Hur shouted. "To the wall!—and let the herd go by!"

So, clinging to the masonry at their right hand, they escaped the might of the rush, and

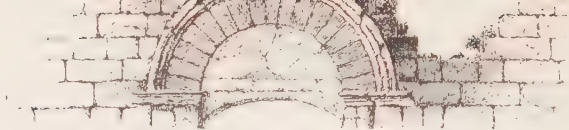


little by little made head-way until, at last, the square was reached.

"Keep together now, and follow me!"

By this time Ben-Hur's leadership was perfect; and as he pushed into the seething mob his party closed after him in a body. And when the Romans, clubbing the people and making merry as they struck them down, came hand to hand with the Galileans, lithe of limb, eager for the fray, and equally armed, they were in turn surprised. Then the shouting was close and fierce; the crash of sticks rapid and deadly; the advance furious as hate could make it. No one performed his part as well as Ben-Hur, whose training served him admirably; for, not merely he knew to strike and guard; his long arm, perfect action, and incomparable strength helped him, also, to success in every encounter. He was at the same time fighting-man and leader. The club he wielded was of goodly length and weighty, so he had need to strike a man but once. He seemed, moreover, to have eyes for each combat of his friends, and the faculty of being at the right moment exactly where he was most needed. In his fighting cry there were inspiration for his party and alarm for his enemies. Thus surprised and equally matched, the Romans at first retired, but finally turned their backs and fled to the portico. The impetuous Galileans would have pursued them to the steps, but Ben-Hur wisely restrained them.

"Stay, my men!" he said. "The centurion yonder is coming with the guard. They have swords and shields; we cannot fight them."



We have done well; let us get back and out of the gate while we may."

They obeyed him, though slowly; for they had frequently to step over their countrymen lying where they had been felled; some writhing and groaning, some praying help, others mute as the dead. But the fallen were not all Jews. In that there was consolation.

The centurion shouted to them as they went off; Ben-Hur laughed at him, and replied in his own tongue, "If we are dogs of Israel, you are jackals of Rome. Remain here, and we will come again."

The Galileans cheered, and laughing went on.

Outside the gate there was a multitude the like of which Ben-Hur had never seen, not even in the circus at Antioch. The house-tops, the streets, the slope of the hill, appeared densely covered with people wailing and praying. The air was filled with their cries and imprecations.

The party were permitted to pass without challenge by the outer guard. But hardly were they out before the centurion in charge at the portico appeared, and in the gate-way called to Ben-Hur.

"Ho, insolent! Art thou a Roman or a Jew?"

Ben-Hur answered, "I am a son of Judah, born here. What wouldst thou with me?"

"Stay and fight."

"Singly?"

"As thou wilt."

Ben-Hur laughed derisively.

"O brave Roman! Worthy son of the bastard Roman Jove! I have no arms."

"Thou shalt have mine," the centurion answered. "I will borrow of the guard here."

The people in hearing of the colloquy became silent; and from them the hush spread afar. But lately Ben-Hur had beaten a Roman under the eyes of Antioch and the Farther East; now, could he beat another one under the eyes of Jerusalem, the honor might be vastly profitable to the cause of the New King. He did not hesitate. Going frankly to the centurion, he said, "I am willing. Lend me thy sword and shield."

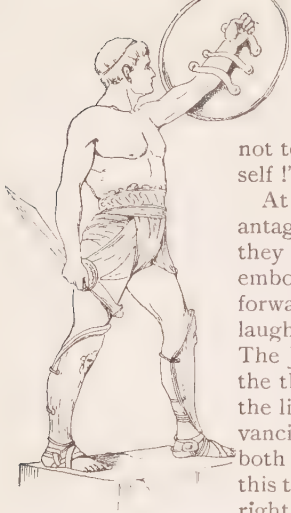
"And the helm and breastplate?" asked the Roman.

"Keep them. They might not fit me."

The arms were as frankly delivered, and directly the centurion was ready. All this time the soldiers in rank close by the gate never moved; they simply listened. As to the multitude, only when the combatants advanced to begin the fight the question sped from mouth to mouth, "Who is he?" And no one knew.

Now the Roman supremacy in arms lay in three things—submission to discipline, the legionary formation of battle, and a peculiar use of the short sword. In combat, they never struck or cut; from first to last they thrust—they advanced thrusting, they retired thrusting; and generally their aim was at the foe-man's face. All this was well known to Ben-Hur. As they were about to engage he said, "I told thee I was a son of Judah; but I did





not tell that I am lanista-taught. Defend thyself !”

At the last word Ben-Hur closed with his antagonist. A moment, standing foot to foot, they glared at each other over the rims of their embossed shields; then the Roman pushed forward and feinted an under-thrust. The Jew laughed at him. A thrust at the face followed. The Jew stepped lightly to the left; quick as the thrust was, the step was quicker. Under the lifted arm of the foe he slid his shield, advancing it until the sword and sword-arm were both caught on its upper surface; another step, this time forward and left, and the man's whole right side was offered to the point. The centurion fell heavily on his breast, clanging the pavement, and Ben-Hur had won. With his foot upon his enemy's back, he raised his shield overhead after a gladiatorial custom, and saluted the imperturbable soldiers by the gate.

When the people realized the victory, they behaved like mad. On the houses far as the Xystus, fast as the word could fly, they waved their shawls and handkerchiefs and shouted; and if he had consented, the Galileans would have carried Ben-Hur off upon their shoulders.

To a petty officer who then advanced from the gate he said, “Thy comrade died like a soldier. I leave him undesploiled. Only his sword and shield are mine.”

With that, he walked away. Off a little he spoke to the Galileans.

“Brethren, you have behaved well. Let us now separate, lest we be pursued. Meet me to-

night at the khan in Bethany. I have something to propose to you of great interest to Israel."

"Who are you?" they asked him.

"A son of Judah," he answered, simply.

A throng eager to see him surged around the party.

"Will you come to Bethany?" he asked.

"Yes, we will come."

"Then bring with you this sword and shield that I may know you."

Pushing brusquely through the increasing crowd, he speedily disappeared.

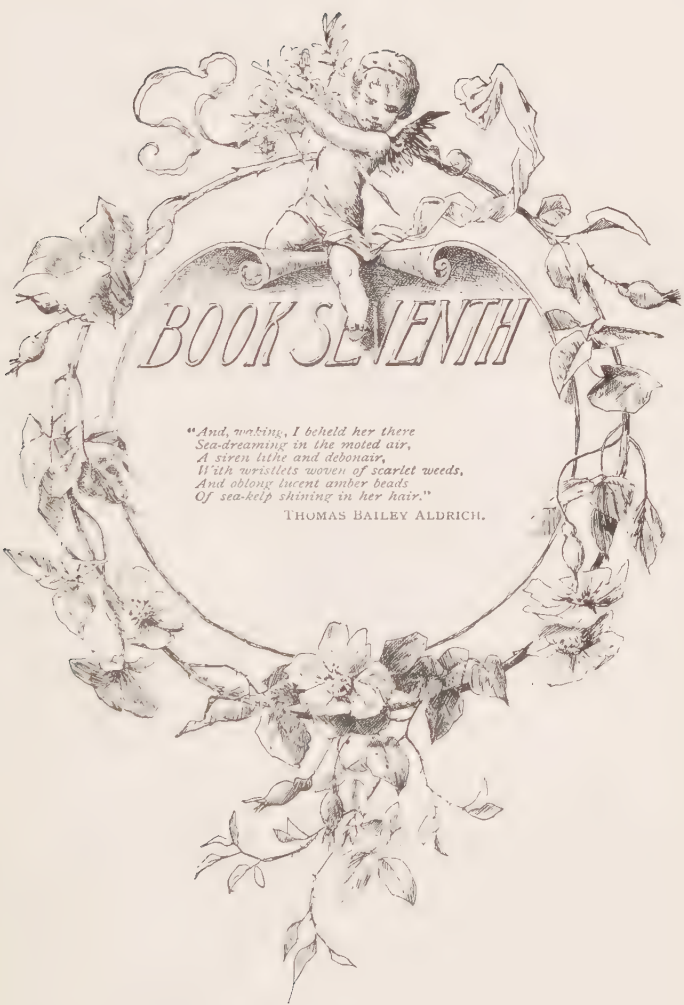
At the instance of Pilate, the people went up from the city, and carried off their dead and wounded, and there was much mourning for them; but the grief was greatly lightened by the victory of the unknown champion, who was everywhere sought, and by every one extolled. The fainting spirit of the nation was revived by the brave deed; insomuch that in the streets and up in the Temple even, amid the solemnities of the feast, old tales of the Maccabees were told again, and thousands shook their heads whispering wisely,

"A little longer, only a little longer, brethren, and Israel will come to her own. Let there be faith in the Lord, and patience."

In such manner Ben-Hur obtained hold on Galilee, and paved the way to greater services in the cause of the King Who Was Coming.

And with what result we shall see.

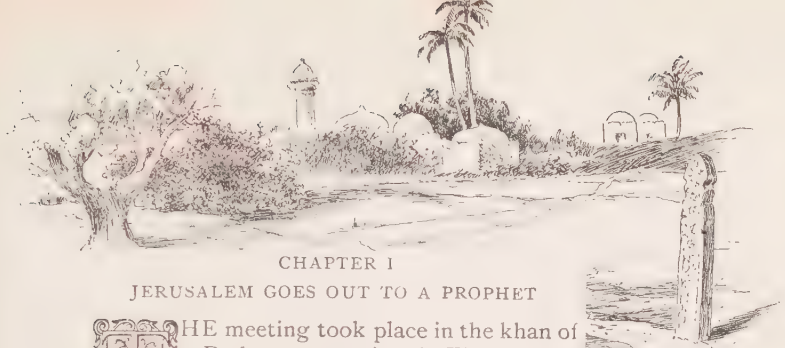




BOOK SEVENTH

*"And, waking, I beheld her there
Sea-dreaming in the moted air,
A siren lithe and debonair,
With wristlets woven of scarlet weeds,
And oblong lucent amber beads,
Of sea-kelp shining in her hair."*

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH.

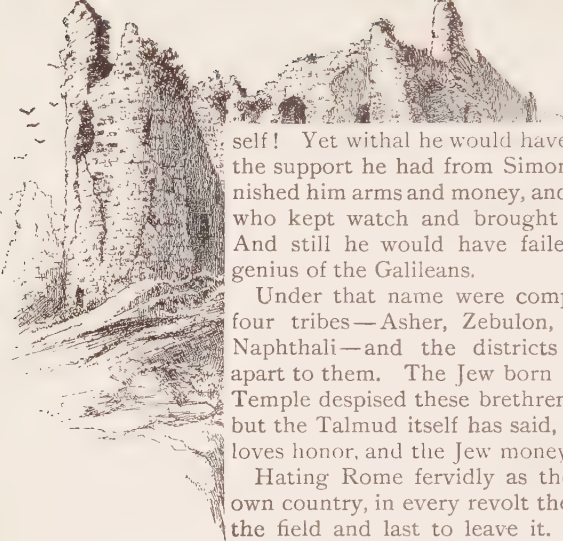


CHAPTER I

JERUSALEM GOES OUT TO A PROPHET

THE meeting took place in the khan of Bethany as appointed. Thence Ben-Hur went with the Galileans into their country, where his exploits up in the old Market-place gave him fame and influence. Before the winter was gone he raised three legions, and organized them after the Roman pattern. He could have had as many more, for the martial spirit of that gallant people never slept. The proceeding, however, required careful guarding as against both Rome and Herod Antipas. Contenting himself for the present with the three, he strove to train and educate them for systematic action. For that purpose he carried the officers over into the lava-beds of Trachonitis, and taught them the use of arms, particularly the javelin and sword, and the manœuvring peculiar to the legionary formation; after which he sent them home as teachers. And soon the training became a pastime of the people.

As may be thought, the task called for patience, skill, zeal, faith, and devotion on his part—qualities into which the power of inspiring others in matters of difficulty is always resolvable; and never man possessed them in greater degree or used them to better effect. How he labored! And with utter denial of



self! Yet withal he would have failed but for the support he had from Simonides, who furnished him arms and money, and from Ilderim, who kept watch and brought him supplies. And still he would have failed but for the genius of the Galileans.

Under that name were comprehended the four tribes—Asher, Zebulon, Issachar, and Naphthali—and the districts originally set apart to them. The Jew born in sight of the Temple despised these brethren of the north; but the Talmud itself has said, "The Galilean loves honor, and the Jew money."

Hating Rome fervidly as they loved their own country, in every revolt they were first in the field and last to leave it. One hundred and fifty thousand Galilean youths perished in the final war with Rome. For the great festal days they went up to Jerusalem marching and camping like armies; yet they were liberal in sentiment, and even tolerant to heathenism. In Herod's beautiful cities, which were Roman in all things, in Sepphoris and Tiberias especially, they took pride, and in the building them gave loyal support. They had for fellow-citizens men from the outside world everywhere, and lived in peace with them. To the glory of the Hebrew name they contributed poets like the singer of the Song of Songs, and prophets like Hosea.

Upon such a people, so quick, so proud, so brave, so devoted, so imaginative, a tale like that of the coming of the King was all-powerful. That he was coming to put Rome down

would have been sufficient to enlist them in the scheme proposed by Ben-Hur; but when, besides, they were assured he was to rule the world, more mighty than Cæsar, more magnificent than Solomon, and that the rule was to last forever, the appeal was irresistible, and they vowed themselves to the cause body and soul. They asked Ben-Hur his authority for the sayings, and he quoted the prophets, and told them of Balthasar in waiting over in Antioch; and they were satisfied, for it was the old much-loved legend of the Messiah, familiar to them almost as the name of the Lord: the long-cherished dream with a time fixed for its realization. The King was not merely coming now; he was at hand.

So with Ben-Hur the winter months rolled by, and spring came, with gladdening showers blown over from the summering sea in the west; and by that time so earnestly and successfully had he toiled that he could say to himself and his followers, "Let the good King come. He has only to tell us where he will have his throne set up. We have the sword-hands to keep it for him."

And in all his dealings with the many men they knew him only as a son of Judah, and by that name.

One evening, over in Trachonitis, Ben-Hur was sitting with some of his Galileans at the mouth of the cave in which he quartered, when an Arab courier rode to him, and delivered a letter. Breaking the package, he read,



“JERUSALEM, Nisan IV.

“A prophet has appeared who men say is Elias. He has been in the wilderness for years, and to our eyes he is a prophet ; and such also is his speech, the burden of which is of one much greater than himself, who, he says, is to come presently, and for whom he is now waiting on the eastern shore of the River Jordan. I have been to see and hear him, and the one he is waiting for is certainly the King you are awaiting. Come and judge for yourself.

“All Jerusalem is going out to the prophet, and with many people else the shore on which he abides is like Mount Olivet in the last days of the Passover.

“MALLUCH.”

Ben-Hur's face flushed with joy.

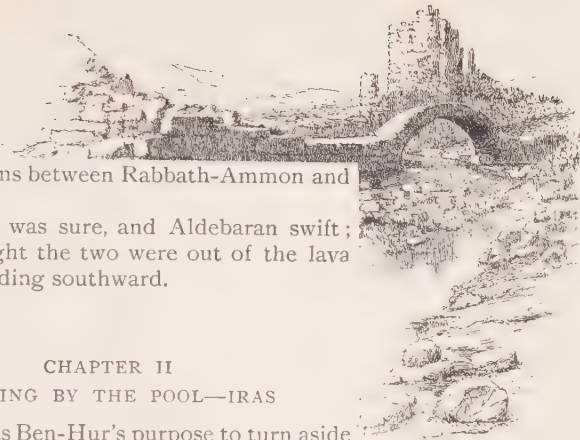
“By this word, O my friends,” he said—“by this word, our waiting is at end. The herald of the King has appeared and announced him.”

Upon hearing the letter read, they also rejoiced at the promise it held out.

“Get ready now,” he added, “and in the morning set your faces homeward ; when arrived there, send word to those under you, and bid them be ready to assemble as I may direct. For myself and you, I will go see if the King be indeed at hand, and send you report. Let us, in the mean time, live in the pleasure of the promise.”

Going into the cave, he addressed a letter to Ilderim, and another to Simonides, giving notice of the news received, and of his purpose to go up immediately to Jerusalem. The letters he despatched by swift messengers. When night fell, and the stars of direction came out, he mounted, and with an Arab guide set out for the Jordan, intending to strike the track





of the caravans between Rabbath-Ammon and Damascus.

The guide was sure, and Aldebaran swift ; so by midnight the two were out of the lava fastness speeding southward.

CHAPTER II

NOONING BY THE POOL—IRAS

IT was Ben-Hur's purpose to turn aside at the break of day, and find a safe place in which to rest ; but the dawn overtook him while out in the Desert, and he kept on, the guide promising to bring him afterwhile to a vale shut in by great rocks, where there were a spring, some mulberry-trees, and herbage in plenty for the horses.

As he rode thinking of the wondrous events so soon to happen, and of the changes they were to bring about in the affairs of men and nations, the guide, ever on the alert, called attention to an appearance of strangers behind them. Everywhere around the Desert stretched away in waves of sand, slowly yellowing in the growing light, and without any green thing visible. Over on the left, but still far off, a range of low mountains extended, apparently interminable. In the vacancy of such a waste an object in motion could not long continue a mystery.

"It is a camel with riders," the guide said, directly.

"Are there others behind?" said Ben-Hur.

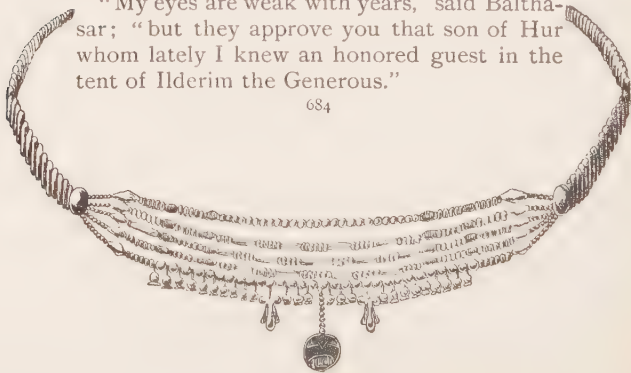
"It is alone. No, there is a man on horseback—the driver, probably."

A little later Ben-Hur himself could see the camel was white and unusually large, reminding him of the wonderful animal he had seen bring Balthasar and Iras to the fountain in the Grove of Daphne. There could be no other like it. Thinking then of the fair Egyptian, insensibly his gait became slower, and at length fell into the merest loiter, until finally he could discern a curtained houdah, and two persons seated within it. If they were Balthasar and Iras! Should he make himself known to them? But it could not be: this was the Desert—and they were alone. But while he debated the question, the long swinging stride of the camel brought its riders up to him. He heard the ringing of the tiny bells, and beheld the rich housings which had been so attractive to the crowd at the Castalian fount. He beheld, also, the Ethiopian, always attendant upon the Egyptians. The tall brute stopped close by his horse, and Ben-Hur, looking up, lo! Iras herself under the raised curtain looking down at him, her great swimming eyes bright with astonishment and inquiry!

"The blessing of the true God upon you!" said Balthasar, in his tremulous voice.

"And to thee and thine be the peace of the Lord," Ben-Hur replied.

"My eyes are weak with years," said Balthasar; "but they approve you that son of Hur whom lately I knew an honored guest in the tent of Ilderim the Generous."



"And thou art that Balthasar, the wise Egyptian, whose speech concerning certain holy things in expectation is having so much to do with the finding me in this waste place. What dost thou here?"

"He is never alone who is where God is—and God is everywhere," Balthasar answered, gravely; "but in the sense of your asking, there is a caravan short way behind us going to Alexandria; and as it is to pass through Jerusalem, I thought best to avail myself of its company as far as the Holy City, whither I am journeying. This morning, however, in discontent with its slow movement—slower because of a Roman cohort in attendance upon it—we rose early, and ventured thus far in advance. As to robbers along the way, we are not afraid, for I have here a signet of Sheik Ilderim; against beasts of prey, God is our sufficient trust."

Ben-Hur bowed and said, "The good sheik's signet is a safeguard wherever the wilderness extends, and the lion shall be swift that overtakes this king of his kind."

He patted the neck of the camel as he spoke.

"Yet," said Iras, with a smile which was not lost upon the youth, whose eyes, it must be admitted, had several times turned to her during the interchange of speeches with the elder—"Yet even he would be better if his fast were broken. Kings have hunger and headaches. If you be, indeed, the Ben-Hur of whom my father has spoken, and whom it was my pleasure to have known as well, you will be happy,





I am sure, to show us some near path to living water, that with its sparkle we may grace a morning's meal in the Desert."

Ben-Hur, nothing loath, hastened to answer.

"Fair Egyptian, I give you sympathy. Can you bear suffering a little longer, we will find the spring you ask for, and I promise that its draught shall be as sweet and cooling as that of the more famous Castalia. With leave, we will make haste."

"I give you the blessing of the thirsty," she replied; "and offer you in return a bit of bread from the city ovens, dipped in fresh butter from the dewy meadows of Damascus."

"A most rare favor! Let us go on."

So saying, Ben-Hur rode forward with the guide, one of the inconveniences of travelling with camels being that it is necessarily an interdiction of polite conversation.

Afterwhile the party came to a shallow wady, down which, turning to the right hand, the guide led them. The bed of the cut was somewhat soft from recent rains, and quite bold in its descent. Momentarily, however, it widened; and ere long the sides became bluffs ribbed with rocks much scarred by floods rushing to lower depths ahead. Finally, from a narrow passage, the travellers entered a spreading vale which was very delightful; but come upon suddenly from the yellow, unrelieved, verdureless plain, it had the effect of a freshly discovered Paradise. The water-channels winding here and there, definable by crisp white shingling,

appeared like threads tangled among islands green with grasses and fringed with reeds. Up from the final depths of the valley of the Jordan some venturous oleanders had crept, and with their large bloom now starred the sunken place. One palm-tree arose in royal assertion. The bases of the boundary-walls were cloaked with clambering vines, and under a leaning cliff over on the left the mulberry grove had planted itself, proclaiming the spring which the party were seeking. And thither the guide conducted them, careless of whistling partridges and lesser birds of brighter hues roused whirring from the reedy coverts.

The water started from a crack in the cliff which some loving hand had enlarged into an arched cavity. Graven over it in bold Hebraic letters was the word GOD. The graver had no doubt drunk there, and tarried many days, and given thanks in that durable form. From the arch the stream ran merrily over a flag spotted with bright moss, and leaped into a pool glassy clear; thence it stole away between grassy banks, nursing the trees before it vanished in the thirsty sand. A few narrow paths were noticeable about the margin of the pool; otherwise the space around was untrodden turf, at sight of which the guide was assured of rest free from intrusion by men. The horses were presently turned loose, and from the kneeling camel the Ethiopian assisted Balthasar and Iras; whereupon the old man, turning his face to the east, crossed his hands reverently upon his breast and prayed.



"Bring me a cup," Iras said, with some impatience.

From the houdah the slave brought her a crystal goblet; then she said to Ben-Hur,

"I will be your servant at the fountain."

They walked to the pool together. He would have dipped the water for her, but she refused his offer, and, kneeling, held the cup to be filled by the stream itself; nor yet content, when it was cooled and overrunning, she tendered him the first draught.

"No," he said, putting the graceful hand aside, and seeing only the large eyes half hidden beneath the arches of the upraised brows, "be the service mine, I pray."

She persisted in having her way.

"In my country, O son of Hur, we have a saying, 'Better a cup-bearer to the fortunate than minister to a king.'"

"Fortunate!" he said.

There were both surprise and inquiry in the tone of his voice and in his look, and she said quickly,

"The gods give us success as a sign by which we may know them on our side. Were you not winner in the Circus?"

His cheeks began to flush.

"That was one sign. There is another. In a combat with swords you slew a Roman."

The flush deepened—not so much for the triumphs themselves as the flattery there was in the thought that she had followed his career with interest. A moment, and the pleasure was succeeded by a reflection. The combat,



he knew, was a matter of report throughout the East; but the name of the victor had been committed to a very few—Malluch, Ilderim, and Simonides. Could they have made a confidante of the woman? So with wonder and gratification he was confused; and seeing it, she arose and said, holding the cup over the pool,

“O gods of Egypt! I give thanks for a hero discovered—thanks that the victim in the Palace of Idernee was not my king of men. And so, O holy gods, I pour and drink.”

Part of the contents of the cup she returned to the stream, the rest she drank. When she took the crystal from her lips, she laughed at him.

“O son of Hur, is it a fashion of the very brave to be so easily overcome by a woman? Take the cup now, and see if you cannot find a happy word in it for me.”

He took the cup, and stooped to refill it.

“A son of Israel has no gods whom he can libate,” he said, playing with the water to hide his amazement, now greater than before. What more did the Egyptian know about him? Had she been told of his relations with Simonides? And there was the treaty with Ilderim—had she knowledge of that also? He was struck with mistrust. Somebody had betrayed his secrets, and they were serious. And, besides, he was going to Jerusalem, just then of all the world the place where such intelligence possessed by an enemy might be most dangerous to him, his associates, and the cause. But was





she an enemy? It is well for us that, while writing is slow, thought is instantaneous. When the cup was fairly cooled, he filled it and arose, saying, with indifference well affected,

"Most fair, were I an Egyptian or a Greek or a Roman, I would say"—he raised the goblet overhead as he spoke—"O ye better gods! I give thanks that there are yet left to the world, despite its wrongs and sufferings, the charm of beauty and the solace of love, and I drink to her who best represents them—to Iras, loveliest of the daughters of the Nile!"

She laid her hand softly upon his shoulder.

"You have offended against the law. The gods you have drunk to are false gods. Why shall I not tell the rabbis on you!"

"Oh!" he replied, laughing, "that is very little to tell for one who knows so much else that is really important."

"I will go further—I will go to the little Jewess who makes the roses grow and the shadows flame in the house of the great merchant over in Antioch. To the rabbis I will accuse you of impenitence; to her—"

"Well, to her?"

"I will repeat what you have said to me under the lifted cup, with the gods for witnesses."

He was still a moment, as if waiting for the Egyptian to go on. With quickened fancy he saw Esther at her father's side listening to the despatches he had forwarded—sometimes reading them. In her presence he had told Simonides the story of the affair in the Palace of

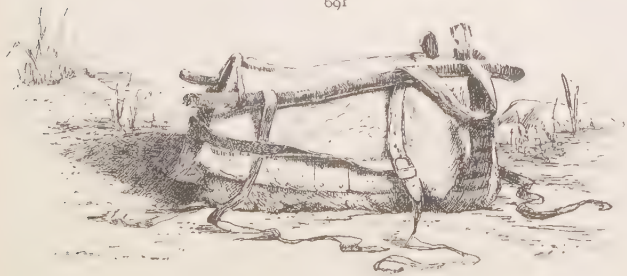
Idernee. She and Iras were acquainted; this one was shrewd and worldly; the other was simple and affectionate, and therefore easily won. Simonides could not have broken faith—nor Ilderim—for if not held by honor, there was no one, unless it might be himself, to whom the consequences of exposure were more serious and certain. Could Esther have been the Egyptian's informant? He did not accuse her; yet a suspicion was sown with the thought, and suspicions, as we all know, are weeds of the mind which grow of themselves, and most rapidly when least wanted. Before he could answer the allusion to the little Jewess, Balthasar came to the pool.

"We are greatly indebted to you, son of Hur," he said, in his grave manner. "This vale is very beautiful; the grass, the trees, the shade, invite us to stay and rest, and the spring here has the sparkle of diamonds in motion, and sings to me of a loving God. It is not enough to thank you for the enjoyment we find; come sit with us, and taste our bread."

"Suffer me first to serve you."

With that Ben-Hur filled the goblet, and gave it to Balthasar, who lifted his eyes in thanksgiving.

Immediately the slave brought napkins; and after laving their hands and drying them, the three seated themselves in Eastern style under the tent which years before had served the Wise Men at the meeting in the Desert. And they ate heartily of the good things taken from the camel's pack.



CHAPTER III
THE LIFE OF A SOUL

THE tent was cosily pitched beneath a tree where the gurgle of the stream was constantly in ear. Overhead the broad leaves hung motionless on their stems; the delicate reed-stalks off in the pearly haze stood up arrowy-straight; occasionally a home-returning bee shot humming athwart the shade, and a partridge creeping from the sedge drank, whistled to his mate, and ran away. The restfulness of the vale, the freshness of the air, the garden beauty, the Sabbath stillness, seemed to have affected the spirits of the elder Egyptian; his voice, gestures, and whole manner were unusually gentle; and often as he bent his eyes upon Ben-Hur conversing with Iras, they softened with pity.

"When we overtook you, son of Hur," he said, at the conclusion of the repast, "it seemed your face was also turned towards Jerusalem. May I ask, without offence, if you are going so far?"

"I am going to the Holy City."

"For the great need I have to spare myself prolonged toil, I will further ask you, Is there a shorter road than that by Rabbath-Ammon?"

"A rougher route, but shorter, lies by Gerasa and Rabbath-Gilead. It is the one I design taking."



"I am impatient," said Balthasar. "Latterly my sleep has been visited by dreams—or rather by the same dream in repetition. A voice—it is nothing more—comes and tells me, 'Haste—arise! He whom thou hast so long awaited is at hand.'"

"You mean he that is to be King of the Jews?" Ben-Hur asked, gazing at the Egyptian in wonder.

"Even so."

"Then you have heard nothing of him?"

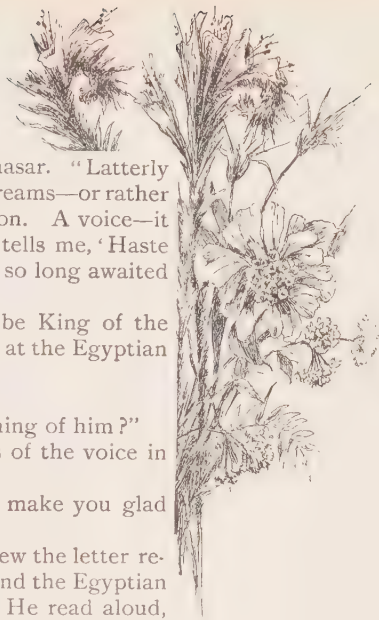
"Nothing except the words of the voice in the dream."

"Here, then, are tidings to make you glad as they made me."

From his gown Ben-Hur drew the letter received from Malluch. The hand the Egyptian held out trembled violently. He read aloud, and as he read his feelings increased; the limp veins in his neck swelled and throbbed. At the conclusion he raised his suffused eyes in thanksgiving and prayer. He asked no questions, yet had no doubts.

"Thou hast been very good to me, O God," he said. "Give me, I pray thee, to see the Saviour again, and worship him, and thy servant will be ready to go in peace."

The words, the manner, the singular personality of the simple prayer, touched Ben-Hur with a sensation new and abiding. God never seemed so actual and so near by; it was as if he were there bending over them or sitting at their side—a Friend whose favors were to be had by the most unceremonious asking





—a Father to whom all his children were alike in love—Father, not more of the Jew than of the Gentile—the universal Father, who needed no intermediates, no rabbis, no priests, no teachers. The idea that such a God might send mankind a Saviour instead of a king appeared to Ben-Hur in a light not merely new, but so plain that he could almost discern both the greater want of such a gift and its greater consistency with the nature of such a Deity. So he could not resist asking,

“Now that he has come, O Balthasar, you still think he is to be a Saviour, and not a king?”

Balthasar gave him a look thoughtful as it was tender.

“How shall I understand you?” he asked, in return. “The Spirit, which was the Star that was my guide of old, has not appeared to me since I met you in the tent of the good sheik; that is to say, I have not seen or heard it as formerly. I believe the voice that spoke to me in my dreams was it; but other than that I have no revelation.”

“I will recall the difference between us,” said Ben-Hur, with deference. “You were of opinion that he would be a king, but not as Cæsar is; you thought his sovereignty would be spiritual, not of the world.”

“Oh yes,” the Egyptian answered; “and I am of the same opinion now. I see the divergence in our faith. You are going to meet a king of men, I a Saviour of souls.”

He paused with the look often seen when

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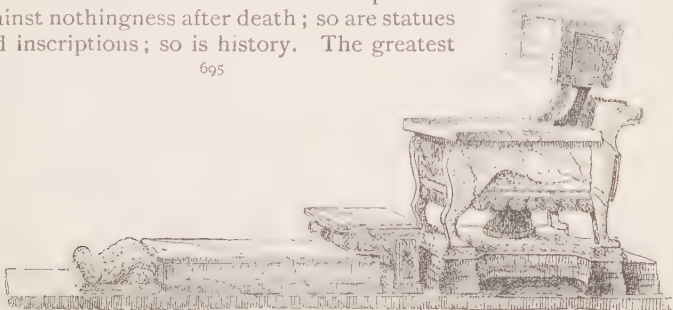


people are struggling, with introverted effort, to disentangle a thought which is either too high for quick discernment or too subtle for simple expression.

"Let me try, O son of Hur," he said, directly, "and help you to a clear understanding of my belief; then it may be, seeing how the spiritual kingdom I expect him to set up can be more excellent in every sense than anything of mere Cæsarean splendor, you will better understand the reason of the interest I take in the mysterious person we are going to welcome.

"I cannot tell you when the idea of a Soul in every man had its origin. Most likely the first parents brought it with them out of the garden in which they had their first dwelling. We all do know, however, that it has never perished entirely out of mind. By some peoples it was lost, but not by all; in some ages it dulled and faded; in others it was overwhelmed with doubts; but, in great goodness, God kept sending us at intervals mighty intellects to argue it back to faith and hope.

"Why should there be a Soul in every man? Look, O son of Hur—for one moment look at the necessity of such a device. To lie down and die, and be no more—no more forever—time never was when man wished for such an end; nor has the man ever been who did not in his heart promise himself something better. The monuments of the nations are all protests against nothingness after death; so are statues and inscriptions; so is history. The greatest

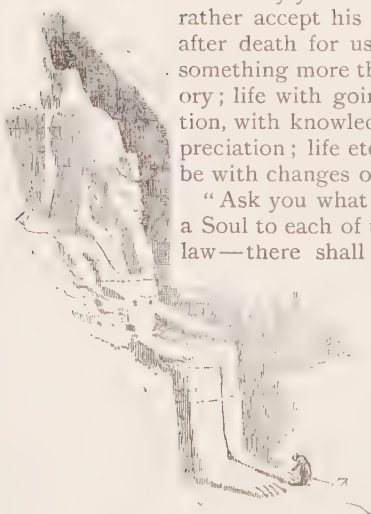


of our Egyptian kings had his effigy cut out of a hill of solid rock. Day after day he went with a host in chariots to see the work; at last it was finished, never effigy so grand, so enduring: it looked like him—the features were his, faithful even in expression. Now may we not think of him saying in that moment of pride, ‘Let Death come; there is an after-life for me!’ He had his wish. The statue is there yet.

“But what is the after-life he thus secured? Only a recollection by men—a glory unsubstantial as moonshine on the brow of the great bust; a story in stone—nothing more. Meantime what has become of the king? There is an embalmed body up in the royal tombs which once was his—an effigy not so fair to look at as the other out in the Desert. But where, O son of Hur, where is the king himself? Is he fallen into nothingness? Two thousand years have gone since he was a man alive as you and I are. Was his last breath the end of him?

“To say yes would be to accuse God; let us rather accept his better plan of attaining life after death for us—actual life, I mean—the something more than a place in mortal memory; life with going and coming, with sensation, with knowledge, with power and all appreciation; life eternal in term though it may be with changes of condition.

“Ask you what God’s plan is? The gift of a Soul to each of us at birth, with this simple law—there shall be no immortality except



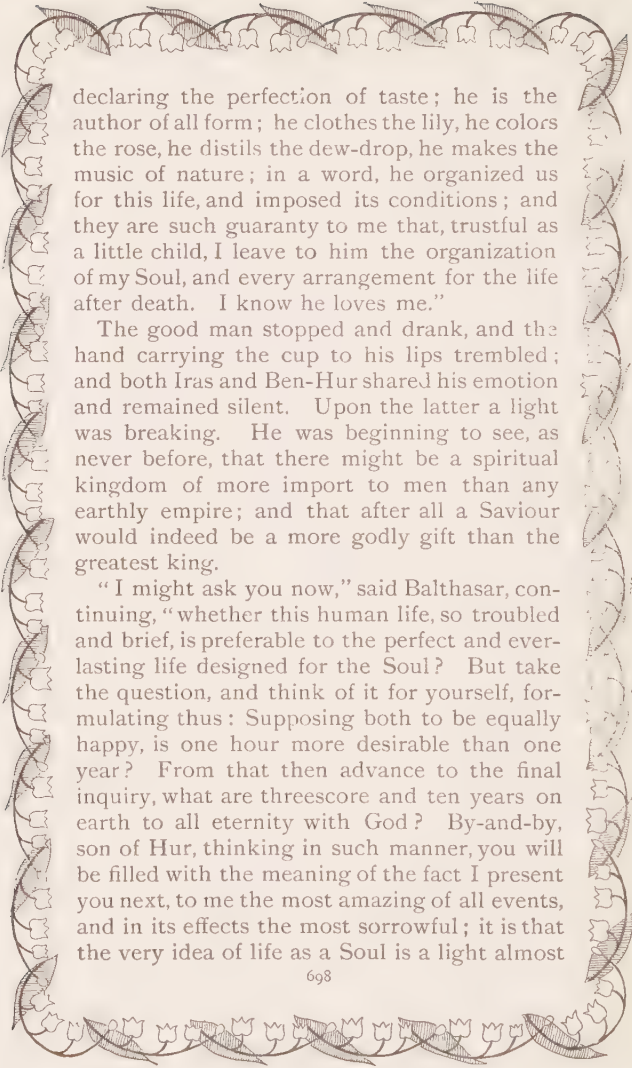
through the Soul. In that law see the necessity of which I spoke.

"Let us turn from the necessity now. A word as to the pleasure there is in the thought of a Soul in each of us. In the first place, it robs death of its terrors by making dying a change for the better, and burial but the planting of a seed from which there will spring a new life. In the next place, behold me as I am—weak, weary, old, shrunken in body, and graceless; look at my wrinkled face, think of my failing senses, listen to my shrilled voice. Ah! what happiness to me in the promise that when the tomb opens, as soon it will, to receive the worn-out husk I call myself, the now viewless doors of the universe, which is but the palace of God, will swing wide ajar to receive me, a liberated immortal Soul!

"I would I could tell the ecstasy there must be in that life to come! Do not say I know nothing about it. This much I know, and it is enough for me—the being a Soul implies conditions of divine superiority. In such a being there is no dust, nor any gross thing; it must be finer than air, more impalpable than light, purer than essence—it is life in absolute purity.

"What now, O son of Hur? Knowing so much, shall I dispute with myself or you about the unnecessaries—about the form of my soul? Or where it is to abide? Or whether it eats and drinks? Or is winged, or wears this or that? No. It is more becoming to trust in God. The beautiful in this world is all from his hand

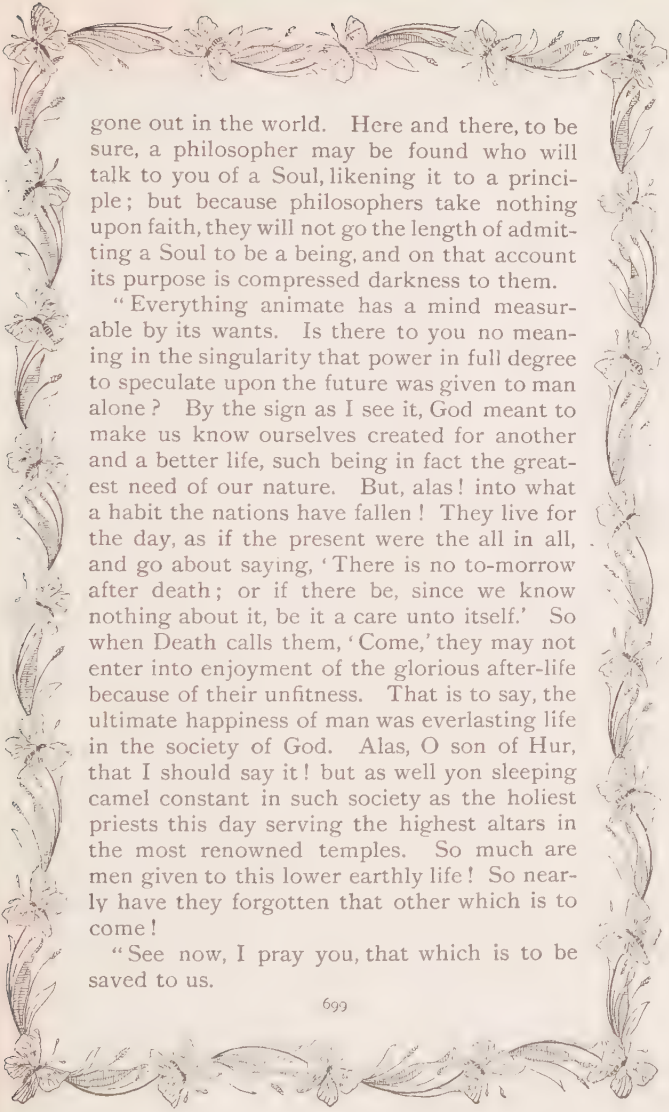


A decorative border with a repeating pattern of stylized leaves and small bell-shaped flowers, framing the text.

declaring the perfection of taste; he is the author of all form; he clothes the lily, he colors the rose, he distils the dew-drop, he makes the music of nature; in a word, he organized us for this life, and imposed its conditions; and they are such guaranty to me that, trustful as a little child, I leave to him the organization of my Soul, and every arrangement for the life after death. I know he loves me."

The good man stopped and drank, and the hand carrying the cup to his lips trembled; and both Iras and Ben-Hur shared his emotion and remained silent. Upon the latter a light was breaking. He was beginning to see, as never before, that there might be a spiritual kingdom of more import to men than any earthly empire; and that after all a Saviour would indeed be a more godly gift than the greatest king.

"I might ask you now," said Balthasar, continuing, "whether this human life, so troubled and brief, is preferable to the perfect and everlasting life designed for the Soul? But take the question, and think of it for yourself, formulating thus: Supposing both to be equally happy, is one hour more desirable than one year? From that then advance to the final inquiry, what are threescore and ten years on earth to all eternity with God? By-and-by, son of Hur, thinking in such manner, you will be filled with the meaning of the fact I present you next, to me the most amazing of all events, and in its effects the most sorrowful; it is that the very idea of life as a Soul is a light almost



gone out in the world. Here and there, to be sure, a philosopher may be found who will talk to you of a Soul, likening it to a principle; but because philosophers take nothing upon faith, they will not go the length of admitting a Soul to be a being, and on that account its purpose is compressed darkness to them.

"Everything animate has a mind measurable by its wants. Is there to you no meaning in the singularity that power in full degree to speculate upon the future was given to man alone? By the sign as I see it, God meant to make us know ourselves created for another and a better life, such being in fact the greatest need of our nature. But, alas! into what a habit the nations have fallen! They live for the day, as if the present were the all in all, and go about saying, 'There is no to-morrow after death; or if there be, since we know nothing about it, be it a care unto itself.' So when Death calls them, 'Come,' they may not enter into enjoyment of the glorious after-life because of their unfitness. That is to say, the ultimate happiness of man was everlasting life in the society of God. Alas, O son of Hur, that I should say it! but as well yon sleeping camel constant in such society as the holiest priests this day serving the highest altars in the most renowned temples. So much are men given to this lower earthly life! So nearly have they forgotten that other which is to come!

"See now, I pray you, that which is to be saved to us.

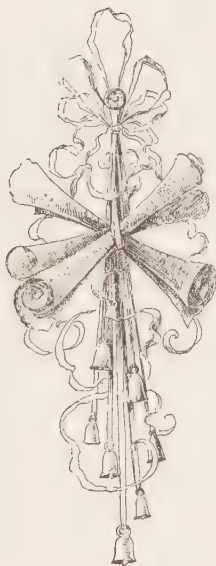
"For my part, speaking with the holiness of truth, I would not give one hour of life as a Soul for a thousand years of life as a man."

Here the Egyptian seemed to become unconscious of companionship and fall away into abstraction.

"This life has its problems," he said, "and there are men who spend their days trying to solve them; but what are they to the problems of the hereafter? What is there like knowing God? Not a scroll of the mysteries, but the mysteries themselves would for that hour at least lie before me revealed; even the innermost and most awful—the power which now we shrink from thought of—which rimmed the void with shores, and lighted the darkness, and out of nothing appointed the universe. All places would be opened. I would be filled with divine knowledge; I would see all glories, taste all delights; I would revel in being. And if, at the end of the hour, it should please God to tell me, 'I take thee into my service forever,' the furthest limit of desire would be passed; after which the attainable ambitions of this life, and its joys of whatever kind, would not be so much as the tinkling of little bells."

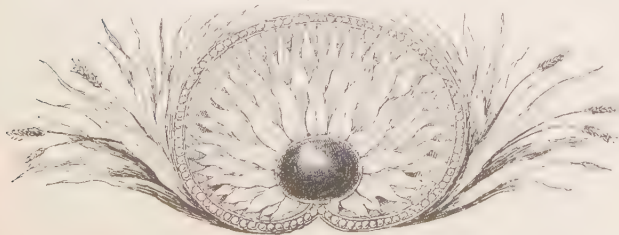
Balthasar paused as if to recover from very ecstasy of feeling; and to Ben-Hur it seemed the speech had been the delivery of a Soul speaking for itself.

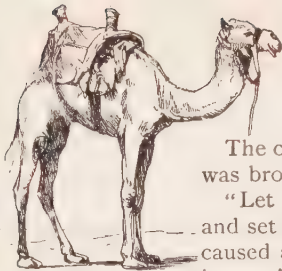
"I pray pardon, son of Hur," the good man continued, with a bow the gravity of which was relieved by the tender look that followed it, "I meant to leave the life of a Soul, its



conditions, pleasures, superiority, to your own reflection and finding out. The joy of the thought has betrayed me into much speech. I set out to show, though ever so faintly, the reason of my faith. It grieves me that words are so weak. But help yourself to truth. Consider first the excellence of the existence which was reserved for us after death, and give heed to the feelings and impulses the thought is sure to awaken in you—heed them, I say, because they are your own Soul astir, doing what it can to urge you in the right way. Consider next that the after-life has become so obscured as to justify calling it a lost light. If you find it, rejoice, O son of Hur—rejoice as I do, though in beggary of words. For then, besides the great gift which is to be saved to us, you will have found the need of a Saviour so infinitely greater than the need of a king; and he we are going to meet will not longer hold place in your hope a warrior with a sword or a monarch with a crown.

“A practical question presents itself—How shall we know him at sight? If you continue in your belief as to his character—that he is to be a king as Herod was—of course you will keep on until you meet a man clothed in purple and with a sceptre. On the other hand, he I look for will be one poor, humble, undistinguished—a man in appearance as other men; and the sign by which I will know him will be never so simple. He will offer to show me and all mankind the way to the eternal life; the beautiful pure Life of the Soul.”





The company sat a moment in silence which was broken by Balthasar.

"Let us arise now," he said—"let us arise and set forward again. What I have said has caused a return of impatience to see him who is ever in my thought; and if I seem to hurry you, O son of Hur—and you, my daughter—be that my excuse."

At his signal the slave brought them wine in a skin bottle; and they poured and drank, and shaking the lap-cloths out arose.

While the slave restored the tent and wares to the box under the houdah, and the Arab brought up the horses, the three principals laved themselves in the pool.

In a little while they were retracing their steps back through the wady, intending to overtake the caravan if it had passed them by.

CHAPTER IV

BEN-HUR KEEPS WATCH WITH IRAS



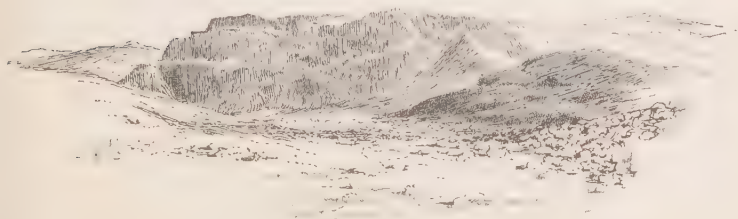
THE caravan, stretched out upon the Desert, was very picturesque; in motion, however, it was like a lazy serpent. By-and-by its stubborn dragging became intolerably irksome to Balthasar, patient as he was; so, at his suggestion, the party determined to go on by themselves.

If the reader be young, or if he has yet a sympathetic recollection of the romanticisms of his youth, he will relish the pleasure with which Ben-Hur, riding near the camel of the

Egyptians, gave a last look at the head of the straggling column almost out of sight on the shimmering plain.

To be definite as may be, and perfectly confidential, Ben-Hur found a certain charm in Iras's presence. If she looked down upon him from her high place, he made haste to get near her; if she spoke to him, his heart beat out of its usual time. The desire to be agreeable to her was a constant impulse. Objects on the way, though ever so common, became interesting the moment she called attention to them; a black swallow in the air pursued by her pointing finger went off in a halo; if a bit of quartz or a flake of mica was seen to sparkle in the drab sand under kissing of the sun, at a word he turned aside and brought it to her; and if she threw it away in disappointment, far from thinking of the trouble he had been put to, he was sorry it proved so worthless, and kept a lookout for something better—a ruby, perchance a diamond. So the purple of the far mountains became intensely deep and rich if she distinguished it with an exclamation of praise; and when, now and then, the curtain of the houdah fell down, it seemed a sudden dullness had dropped from the sky bedraggling all the landscape. Thus disposed, yielding to the sweet influence, what shall save him from the dangers there are in days of the close companionship with the fair Egyptian incident to the solitary journey they were entered upon?

For that there is no logic in love, nor the least mathematical element, it is simply natural



that she shall fashion the result who has the wielding of the influence.

To quicken the conclusion, there were signs, too, that she well knew the influence she was exercising over him. From some place under hand she had since morning drawn a caul of golden coins, and adjusted it so the gleaming strings fell over her forehead and upon her cheeks, blending lustrously with the flowing of her blue-black hair. From the same safe deposit she had also produced articles of jewelry—rings for finger and ear, bracelets, a necklace of pearls—also, a shawl embroidered with threads of fine gold—the effect of all which she softened with a scarf of Indian lace skilfully folded about her throat and shoulders. And so arrayed she plied Ben-Hur with countless coquetties of speech and manner; showering him with smiles; laughing in flute-like tremolo—and all the while following him with glances, now melting-tender, now sparkling-bright. By such play Antony was weaned from his glory; yet she who wrought his ruin was really not half so beautiful as this her countrywoman.

And so to them the nooning came, and the evening.

The sun at its going down behind a spur of the old Bashan left the party halted by a pool of clear water of the rains out in the Abilene Desert. There the tent was pitched, the supper eaten, and preparations made for the night.

The second watch was Ben-Hur's; and he was standing, spear in hand, within arm-reach of the dozing camel, looking a while at the



stars, then over the veiled land. The stillness was intense; only after long spells a warm breath of wind would sough past, but without disturbing him, for yet in thought he entertained the Egyptian, recounting her charms, and sometimes debating how she came by his secrets, the uses she might make of them, and the course he should pursue with her. And through all the debate Love stood off but a little way—a strong temptation, the stronger of a gleam of policy behind. At the very moment he was most inclined to yield to the allurements a hand, very fair even in the moonless gloaming, was laid softly upon his shoulder. The touch thrilled him; he started, turned—and she was there.

“I thought you asleep,” he said, presently.

“Sleep is for old people and little children, and I came out to look at my friends, the stars in the south—those now holding the curtains of midnight over the Nile. But confess yourself surprised!”

He took the hand which had fallen from his shoulder, and said, “Well, was it by an enemy?”

“Oh no! To be an enemy is to hate, and hating is a sickness which Isis will not suffer to come near me. She kissed me, you should know, on the heart when I was a child.”

“Your speech does not sound in the least like your father’s. Are you not of his faith?”

“I might have been”—and she laughed low—“I might have been had I seen what he has. I may be when I get old like him. There



should be no religion for youth, only poetry and philosophy; and no poetry except such as is the inspiration of wine and mirth and love, and no philosophy that does not excuse for follies which cannot outlive a season. My father's God is too awful for me. I failed to find him in the Grove of Daphne. He was never heard of as present in the atria of Rome. But, son of Hur, I have a wish."

"A wish! Where is he who could say it no?"

"I will try you."

"Tell it then."

"It is very simple. I wish to help you."

She drew closer as she spoke.

He laughed, and replied, lightly, "O Egypt!—I came near saying dear Egypt!—does not the sphinx abide in your country?"

"Well?"

"You are one of its riddles. Be merciful, and give me a little clew to help me understand you. In what do I need help? And how can you help me?"

She took her hand from him, and, turning to the camel, spoke to it endearingly, and patted its monstrous head as it were a thing of beauty.

"O thou last and swiftest and stateliest of the herds of Job! Sometimes thou, too, goest stumbling, because the way is rough and stony and the burden grievous. How is it thou knowest the kind intent by a word, and always makest answer gratefully, though the help offered is from a woman? I will kiss thee, thou royal





brute!"—she stooped and touched its broad forehead with her lips, saying immediately, "because in thy intelligence there is no suspicion!"

And Ben-Hur, restraining himself, said calmly, "The reproach has not failed its mark, O Egypt! I seem to say thee no; may it not be because I am under seal of honor, and by my silence cover the lives and fortunes of others?"

"May be!" she said, quickly. "It is so."

He shrank a step, and asked, his voice sharp with amazement, "What all knowest thou?"

She answered, after a laugh,

"Why do men deny that the senses of women are sharper than theirs? Your face has been under my eyes all day. I had but to look at it to see you bore some weight in mind; and to find the weight, what had I to do more than recall your debates with my father? Son of Hur!"—she lowered her voice with singular dexterity, and, going nearer, spoke so her breath was warm upon his cheek—"son of Hur! he thou art going to find is to be King of the Jews, is he not?"

His heart beat fast and hard.

"A King of the Jews like Herod, only greater," she continued.

He looked away—into the night, up to the stars; then his eyes met hers, and lingered there; and her breath was on his lips, so near was she.

"Since morning," she said, further, "we have been having visions. Now if I tell you mine, will you serve me as well? What! silent still?"

She pushed his hand away, and turned as if to go; but he caught her, and said, eagerly, "Stay—stay and speak!"

She went back, and with her hand upon his shoulder, leaned against him; and he put his arm around her, and drew her close, very close; and in the caress was the promise she asked.

"Speak, and tell me thy visions, O Egypt, dear Egypt! A prophet—nay, not the Tishbite, not even the Law-giver—could have refused an asking of thine. I am at thy will. Be merciful—merciful, I pray."

The entreaty passed apparently unheard, for looking up and nestling in his embrace, she said, slowly, "The vision which followed me was of magnificent war—war on land and sea—with clashing of arms and rush of armies, as if Cæsar and Pompey were come again, and Octavius and Antony. A cloud of dust and ashes arose and covered the world, and Rome was not any more; all dominion returned to the East; out of the cloud issued another race of heroes; and there were vaster satrapies and brighter crowns for giving away than were ever known. And, son of Hur, while the vision was passing, and after it was gone, I kept asking myself, 'What shall he not have who served the King earliest and best?'"

Again Ben-Hur recoiled. The question was the very question which had been with him all day. Presently he fancied he had the clew he wanted.

"So," he said, "I have you now. The satrapies and crowns are the things to which you



would help me. I see, I see! And there never was such queen as you would be, so shrewd, so beautiful, so royal—never! But, alas, dear Egypt! by the vision as you show it me the prizes are all of war, and you are but a woman, though Isis did kiss you on the heart. And crowns are starry gifts beyond your power of help, unless, indeed, you have a way to them more certain than that of the sword. If so, O Egypt, Egypt, show it me, and I will walk in it, if only for your sake.”

She removed his arm, and said, “Spread your cloak upon the sand—here, so I can rest against the camel. I will sit, and tell you a story which came down the Nile to Alexandria, where I had it.”

He did as she said, first planting the spear in the ground near by.

“And what shall I do?” he said, ruefully, when she was seated. “In Alexandria is it customary for the listeners to sit or stand?”

From the comfortable place against the old domestic she answered, laughing, “The audiences of story-tellers are wilful, and sometimes they do as they please.”

Without more ado he stretched himself upon the sand, and put her arm about his neck.

“I am ready,” he said.

And directly she began:

HOW THE BEAUTIFUL CAME TO THE EARTH.

“You must know, in the first place, that Isis was—and, for that matter, she may yet be—the most beautiful of deities; and Osiris, her husband, though





wise and powerful, was sometimes stung with jealousy of her, for only in their loves are the gods like mortals.

"The palace of the Divine Wife was of silver, crowning the tallest mountain in the moon, and thence she passed often to the sun, in the heart of which, a source of eternal light, Osiris kept his palace of gold too shining for men to look at.

"One time—there are no days with the gods—while she was full pleasantly with him on the roof of the golden palace, she chanced to look, and afar, just on the line of the universe, saw Indra passing with an army of simians, all borne upon the backs of flying eagles. He, the Friend of Living Things—so with much love is Indra called—was returning from his final war with the hideous Rakshakas—returning victorious; and in his suite were Rama, the hero, and Sita, his bride, who, next to Isis herself, was the very most beautiful. And Isis arose, and took off her girdle of stars, and waved it to Sita—to Sita, mind you—waved it in glad salute. And instantly, between the marching host and the two on the golden roof, a something as of night fell, and shut out the view; but it was not night—only the frown of Osiris.

"It happened the subject of his speech that moment was such as none else than they could think of; and he arose, and said, majestically, 'Get thee home. I will do the work myself. To make a perfectly happy being I do not need thy help. Get thee gone.'

"Now Isis had eyes large as those of the white cow which in the temple eats sweet grasses from the hands of the faithful even while they say their prayers; and her eyes were the color of the cow's, and quite as tender. And she too arose and said, smiling as she spoke, so her look was little more than the glow of the moon in the hazy harvest-month, 'Farewell, good my lord. You will call me presently, I know; for without me you cannot make the perfectly happy creature of which you were thinking, any more'—and she stopped to laugh, knowing well the truth of the saying—'any more, my lord, than you yourself can be perfectly happy without me.'

" 'We will see,' he said.

" And she went her way, and took her needles and her chair, and on the roof of the silver palace sat watching and knitting.

" And the will of Osiris, at labor in his mighty breast, was as the sound of the mills of all the other gods grinding at once, so loud that the near stars rattled like seeds in a parched pod ; and some dropped out and were lost. And while the sound kept on she waited and knit ; nor lost she ever a stitch the while.

" Soon a spot appeared in the space over towards the sun ; and it grew until it was great as the moon, and then she knew a world was intended ; but when, growing and growing, at last it cast her planet in the shade, all save the little point lighted by her presence, she knew how very angry he was ; yet she knit away, assured that the end would be as she had said.

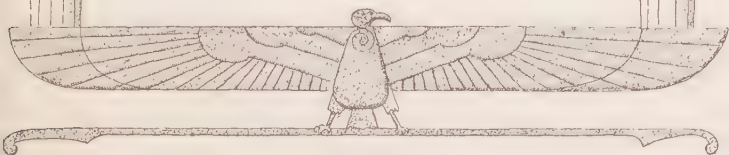
" And so came the earth, at first but a cold gray mass hanging listless in the hollow void. Later she saw it separate into divisions ; here a plain, there a mountain, yonder a sea, all as yet without a sparkle. And then, by a river-bank, something moved ; and she stopped her knitting for wonder. The something arose, and lifted its hands to the sun in sign of knowledge whence it had its being. And this First Man was beautiful to see. And about him were the creations we call nature—the grass, the trees, birds, beasts, even the insects and reptiles.

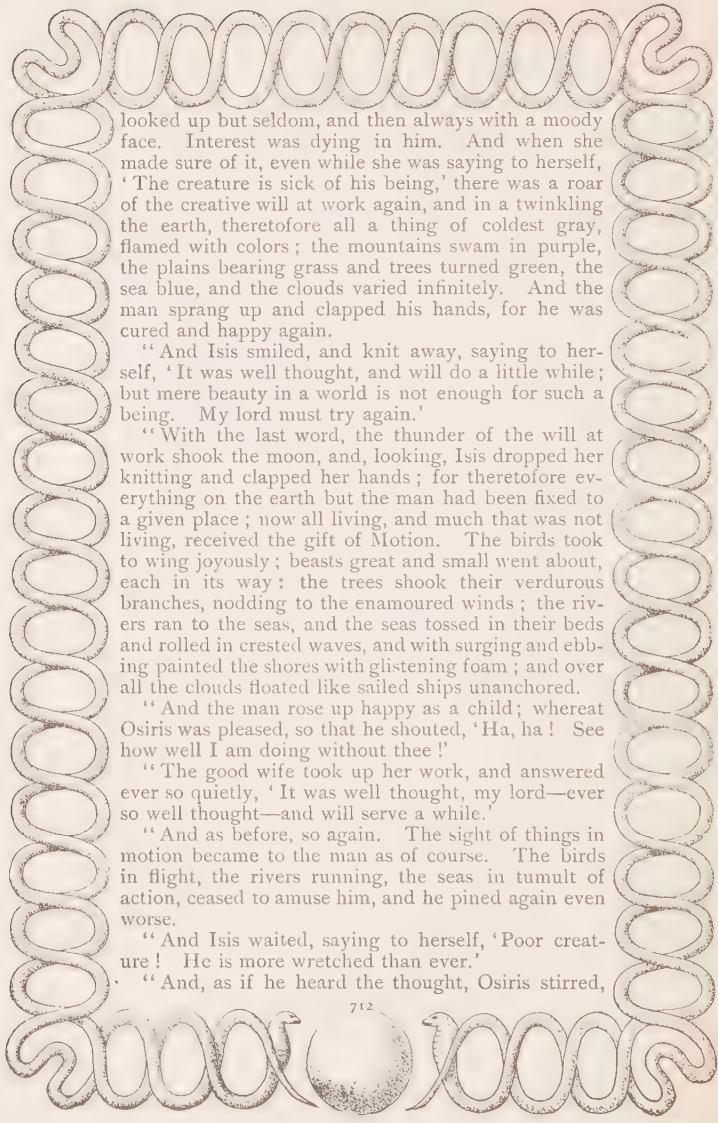
" And for a time the man went about happy in his life : it was easy to see how happy he was. And in the lull of the sound of the laboring will Isis heard a scornful laugh, and presently the words, blown across from the sun,

" 'Thy help, indeed ! Behold a creature perfectly happy !'

" And Isis fell to knitting again, for she was patient as Osiris was strong ; and if he could work, she could wait ; and wait she did, knowing that mere life is not enough to keep anything content.

" And sure enough. Not long until the Divine Wife could see a change in the man. He grew listless, and kept to one place prone by the river, and





looked up but seldom, and then always with a moody face. Interest was dying in him. And when she made sure of it, even while she was saying to herself, 'The creature is sick of his being,' there was a roar of the creative will at work again, and in a twinkling the earth, theretofore all a thing of coldest gray, flamed with colors; the mountains swam in purple, the plains bearing grass and trees turned green, the sea blue, and the clouds varied infinitely. And the man sprang up and clapped his hands, for he was cured and happy again.

"And Isis smiled, and knit away, saying to herself, 'It was well thought, and will do a little while; but mere beauty in a world is not enough for such a being. My lord must try again.'

"With the last word, the thunder of the will at work shook the moon, and, looking, Isis dropped her knitting and clapped her hands; for theretofore everything on the earth but the man had been fixed to a given place; now all living, and much that was not living, received the gift of Motion. The birds took to wing joyously; beasts great and small went about, each in its way: the trees shook their verdurous branches, nodding to the enamoured winds; the rivers ran to the seas, and the seas tossed in their beds and rolled in crested waves, and with surging and ebbing painted the shores with glistening foam; and over all the clouds floated like sailed ships unanchored.

"And the man rose up happy as a child; whereat Osiris was pleased, so that he shouted, 'Ha, ha! See how well I am doing without thee!'

"The good wife took up her work, and answered ever so quietly, 'It was well thought, my lord—ever so well thought—and will serve a while.'

"And as before, so again. The sight of things in motion became to the man as of course. The birds in flight, the rivers running, the seas in tumult of action, ceased to amuse him, and he pined again even worse.

"And Isis waited, saying to herself, 'Poor creature! He is more wretched than ever.'

"And, as if he heard the thought, Osiris stirred,



and the noise of his will shook the universe ; the sun in its central seat alone stood firm. And Isis looked, but saw no change ; then, while she was smiling, assured that her lord's last invention was sped, suddenly the creature arose, and seemed to listen ; and his face brightened, and he clapped his hands for joy, for Sounds were heard the first time on earth—sounds dissonant, sounds harmonious. The winds murmured in the trees ; the birds sang, each kind a song of its own, or chattered in speech ; the rivelets running to the rivers became so many harpers with harps of silver strings all tinkling together ; and the rivers running to the seas surged on in solemn accord, while the seas beat the land to a tune of thunder. There was music, music everywhere, and all the time ; so the man could not but be happy.

“ Then Isis mused, thinking how well, how wondrous well, her lord was doing ; but presently she shook her head. Color, Motion, Sound—and she repeated them slowly—there was no element else of beauty except Form and Light, and to them the earth had been born. Now, indeed, Osiris was done ; and if the creature should again fall off into wretchedness, her help must be asked ; and her fingers flew—two, three, five, even ten stitches she took at once.

“ And the man was happy a long time—longer than ever before ; it seemed, indeed, he would never tire again. But Isis knew better ; and she waited and waited, nor minded the many laughs flung at her from the sun ; she waited and waited, and at last saw signs of the end. Sounds became familiar to him, and in their range, from the chirruping of the cricket under the roses to the roar of the seas and the bel- low of the clouds in storm, there was not anything unusual. And he pined and sickened, and sought his place of moping by the river, and at last fell down motionless.

“ Then Isis in pity spoke.

“ ‘ My lord,’ she said, ‘ the creature is dying.’ ”

“ But Osiris, though seeing it all, held his peace, he could do no more.

“ ‘ Shall I help him ? ’ she asked.



"Osiris was too proud to speak.

"Then Isis took the last stitch in her knitting, and gathering her work in a roll of brilliance flung it off—flung it so it fell close to the man. And he, hearing the sound of the fall so near by, looked up, and lo! a Woman—the First Woman—was stooping to help him! She reached a hand to him; he caught it and arose; and nevermore was miserable, but evermore happy."

"Such, O son of Hur! is the genesis of the beautiful, as they tell it on the Nile."

She paused.

"A pretty invention, and cunning," he said, directly; "but it is imperfect. What did Osiris afterwards?"

"Oh, yes," she replied. "He called the Divine Wife back to the sun, and they went on all pleasantly together, each helping the other."

"And shall I not do as the first man?"

He carried the hand resting upon his neck to his lips. "In love—in love!" he said.

His head dropped softly into her lap.

"You will find the King," she said, placing her other hand caressingly upon his head. "You will go on and find the King and serve him. With your sword you will earn his richest gifts; and his best soldier will be my hero."

He turned his face, and saw hers close above. In all the sky there was that moment nothing so bright to him as her eyes, enshadowed though they were. Presently he sat up, and put his arms about her, and kissed her passionately, saying, "O Egypt, Egypt! If the King has crowns in gift, one shall be mine; and I will

bring it and put it here over the place my lips have marked. You shall be a queen—my queen—no one more beautiful! And we will be ever, ever so happy!”

“And you will tell me everything, and let me help you in all?” she said, kissing him in return.

The question chilled his fervor.

“Is it not enough that I love you?” he asked.

“Perfect love means perfect faith,” she replied. “But never mind—you will know me better.”

She took her hand from him and arose.

“You are cruel,” he said.

Moving away, she stopped by the camel, and touched its front face with her lips.

“O thou noblest of thy kind!—that, because there is no suspicion in thy love.”

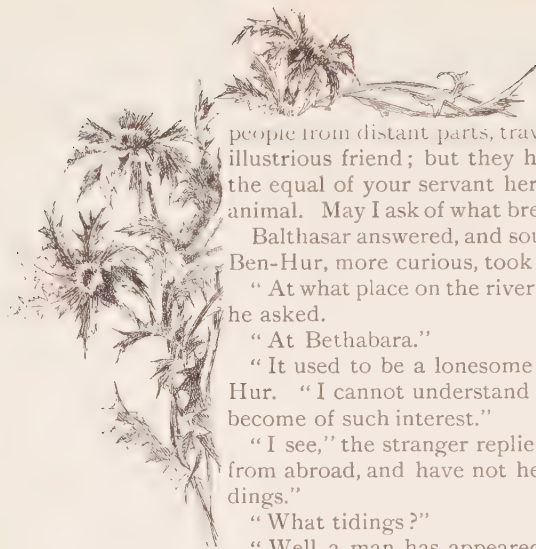
An instant, and she was gone.

CHAPTER V AT BETHABARA



HE third day of the journey the party nooned by the river Jabbok, where there were a hundred or more men, mostly of Peræa, resting themselves and their beasts. Hardly had they dismounted, before a man came to them with a pitcher of water and a bowl, and offered them drink; as they received the attention with much courtesy, he said, looking at the camel, “I am returning from the Jordan, where just now there are many





people from distant parts, travelling as you are, illustrious friend; but they had none of them the equal of your servant here. A very noble animal. May I ask of what breed he is sprung?"

Balthasar answered, and sought his rest; but Ben-Hur, more curious, took up the remark.

"At what place on the river are the people?" he asked.

"At Bethabara."

"It used to be a lonesome ford," said Ben-Hur. "I cannot understand how it can have become of such interest."

"I see," the stranger replied; "you, too, are from abroad, and have not heard the good tidings."

"What tidings?"

"Well, a man has appeared out of the wilderness—a very holy man—with his mouth full of strange words, which take hold of all who hear them. He calls himself John the Nazarite, son of Zacharias, and says he is the messenger sent before the Messiah."

Even Iras listened closely while the man continued:

"They say of this John that he has spent his life from childhood in a cave down by Engedi, praying and living more strictly than the Essenes. Crowds go to hear him preach. I went to hear him with the rest."

"Have all these, your friends, been there?"

"Most of them are going; a few are coming away."

"What does he preach?"

"A new doctrine—one never before taught

in Israel, as all say. He calls it repentance and baptism. The rabbis do not know what to make of him; nor do we. Some have asked him if he is the Christ, others if he is Elias; but to them all he has the answer, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord!'"

At this point the man was called away by his friends; as he was going, Balthasar spoke.

"Good stranger!" he said, tremulously, "tell us if we shall find the preacher at the place you left him."

"Yes, at Bethabara."

"Who should this Nazarite be?" said Ben-Hur to Iras, "if not the herald of our King?"

In so short a time he had come to regard the daughter as more interested in the mysterious personage he was looking for than the aged father! Nevertheless, the latter, with a positive glow in his sunken eyes, half arose, and said,

"Let us make haste. I am not tired."

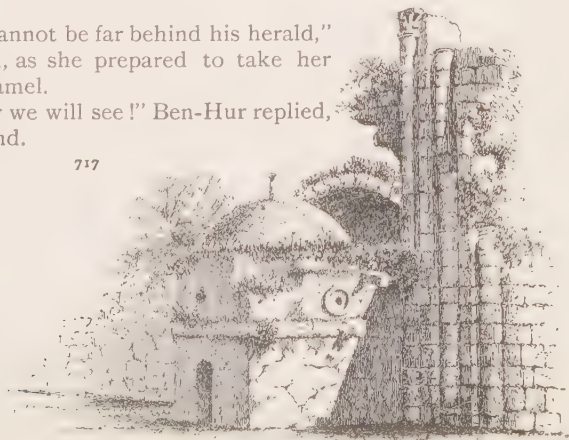
They turned away to help the slave.

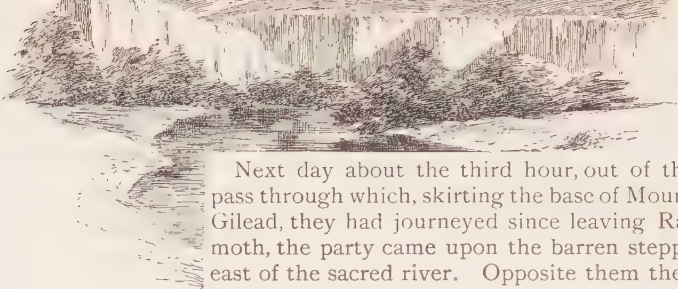
There was little conversation between the three at the stopping-place for the night west of Ramoth-Gilead.

"Let us arise early, son of Hur," said the old man. "The Saviour may come, and we not there."

"The King cannot be far behind his herald," Iras whispered, as she prepared to take her place on the camel.

"To-morrow we will see!" Ben-Hur replied, kissing her hand.





Next day about the third hour, out of the pass through which, skirting the base of Mount Gilead, they had journeyed since leaving Ramoth, the party came upon the barren steppe east of the sacred river. Opposite them they saw the upper limit of the old palm lands of Jericho, stretching off to the hill-country of Judea. Ben-Hur's blood ran quickly, for he knew the ford was close at hand.

"Content you, good Balthasar," he said, "we are almost there."

The driver quickened the camel's pace. Soon they caught sight of booths and tents and tethered animals; and then of the river, and a multitude collected down close by the bank, and yet another multitude on the western shore. Knowing that the preacher was preaching, they made greater haste; yet, as they were drawing near, suddenly there was a commotion in the mass, and it began to break up and disperse.

They were too late!

"Let us stay here," said Ben-Hur to Balthasar, who was wringing his hands. "The Nazarite may come this way."

The people were too intent upon what they had heard, and too busy in discussion, to notice the new-comers. When some hundreds were gone by, and it seemed the opportunity to so much as see the Nazarite was lost to the latter, up the river not far away they beheld a person coming towards them of such singular appearance they forgot all else.

Outwardly the man was rude and uncouth,

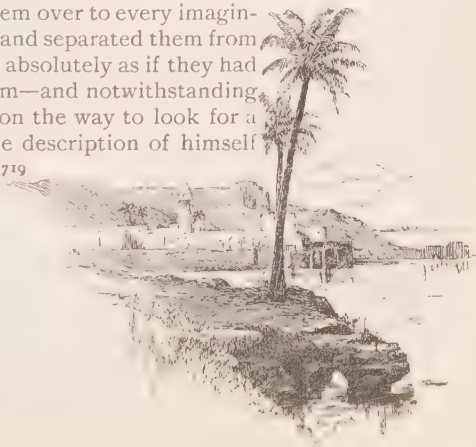
even savage. Over a thin, gaunt visage of the hue of brown parchment, over his shoulders and down his back below the middle, in witch-like locks, fell a covering of sun-scorched hair. His eyes were burning-bright. All his right side was naked, and of the color of his face, and quite as meagre; a shirt of the coarsest camel's hair—coarse as Bedouin tent-cloth—clothed the rest of his person to the knees, being gathered at the waist by a broad girdle of untanned leather. His feet were bare. A scrip, also of untanned leather, was fastened to the girdle. He used a knotted staff to help him forward. His movement was quick, decided, and strangely watchful. Every little while he tossed the unruly hair from his eyes, and peered round as if searching for somebody.

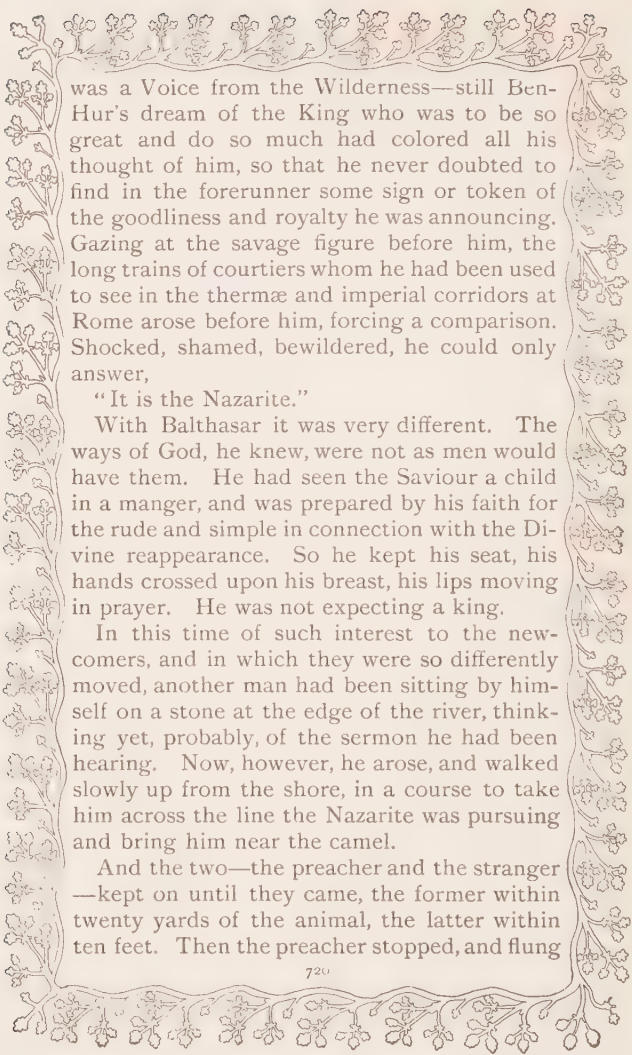
The fair Egyptian surveyed the son of the Desert with surprise, not to say disgust. Presently, raising the curtain of the houdah, she spoke to Ben-Hur, who sat his horse near by.

"Is that the herald of thy King?"

"It is the Nazarite," he replied, without looking up.

In truth, he was himself more than disappointed. Despite his familiarity with the ascetic colonists in En-Gedi—their dress, their indifference to all worldly opinion, their constancy to vows which gave them over to every imaginable suffering of body, and separated them from others of their kind as absolutely as if they had not been born like them—and notwithstanding he had been notified on the way to look for a Nazarite whose simple description of himself



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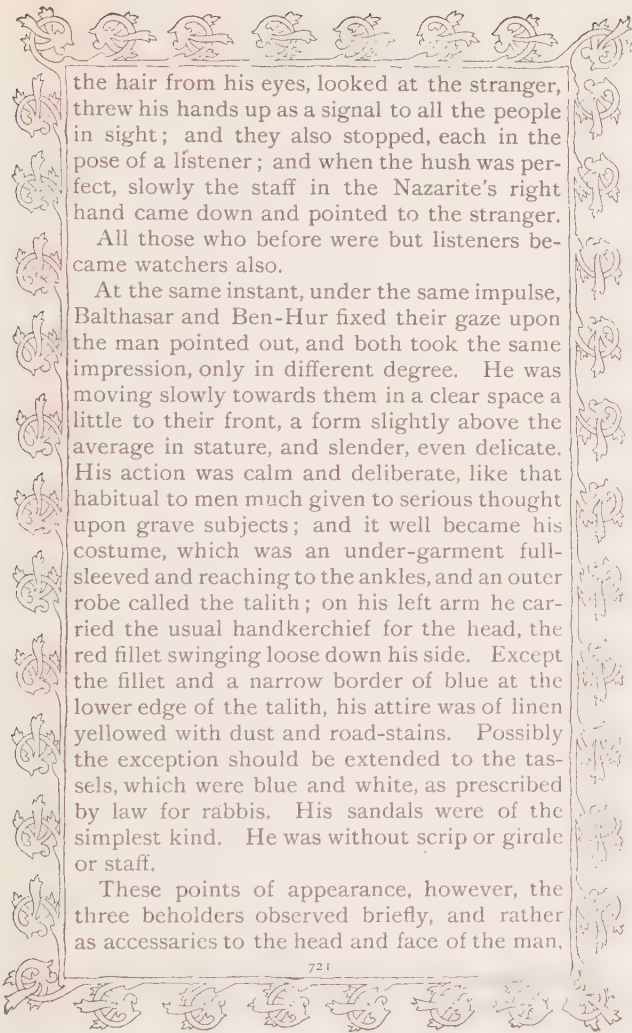
was a Voice from the Wilderness—still Ben-Hur's dream of the King who was to be so great and do so much had colored all his thought of him, so that he never doubted to find in the forerunner some sign or token of the goodliness and royalty he was announcing. Gazing at the savage figure before him, the long trains of courtiers whom he had been used to see in the thermæ and imperial corridors at Rome arose before him, forcing a comparison. Shocked, shamed, bewildered, he could only answer,

"It is the Nazarite."

With Balthasar it was very different. The ways of God, he knew, were not as men would have them. He had seen the Saviour a child in a manger, and was prepared by his faith for the rude and simple in connection with the Divine reappearance. So he kept his seat, his hands crossed upon his breast, his lips moving in prayer. He was not expecting a king.

In this time of such interest to the newcomers, and in which they were so differently moved, another man had been sitting by himself on a stone at the edge of the river, thinking yet, probably, of the sermon he had been hearing. Now, however, he arose, and walked slowly up from the shore, in a course to take him across the line the Nazarite was pursuing and bring him near the camel.

And the two—the preacher and the stranger—kept on until they came, the former within twenty yards of the animal, the latter within ten feet. Then the preacher stopped, and flung

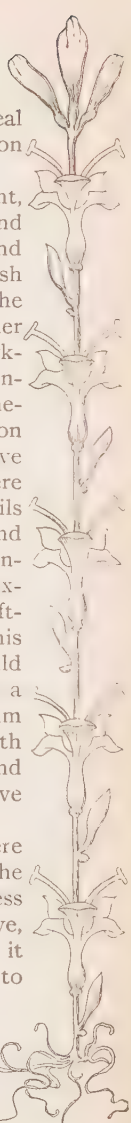


the hair from his eyes, looked at the stranger, threw his hands up as a signal to all the people in sight; and they also stopped, each in the pose of a listener; and when the hush was perfect, slowly the staff in the Nazarite's right hand came down and pointed to the stranger.

All those who before were but listeners became watchers also.

At the same instant, under the same impulse, Balthasar and Ben-Hur fixed their gaze upon the man pointed out, and both took the same impression, only in different degree. He was moving slowly towards them in a clear space a little to their front, a form slightly above the average in stature, and slender, even delicate. His action was calm and deliberate, like that habitual to men much given to serious thought upon grave subjects; and it well became his costume, which was an under-garment full-sleeved and reaching to the ankles, and an outer robe called the talith; on his left arm he carried the usual handkerchief for the head, the red fillet swinging loose down his side. Except the fillet and a narrow border of blue at the lower edge of the talith, his attire was of linen yellowed with dust and road-stains. Possibly the exception should be extended to the tassels, which were blue and white, as prescribed by law for rabbis. His sandals were of the simplest kind. He was without scrip or girale or staff.

These points of appearance, however, the three beholders observed briefly, and rather as accessories to the head and face of the man,



which—especially the latter—were the real sources of the spell they caught in common with all who stood looking at him.

The head was open to the cloudless light, except as it was draped with hair long and slightly waved, and parted in the middle, and auburn in tint, with a tendency to reddish golden where most strongly touched by the sun. Under a broad, low forehead, under black well-arched brows, beamed eyes dark-blue and large, and softened to exceeding tenderness by lashes of the great length sometimes seen on children, but seldom, if ever, on men. As to the other features, it would have been difficult to decide whether they were Greek or Jewish. The delicacy of the nostrils and mouth was unusual to the latter type; and when it was taken into account with the gentleness of the eyes, the pallor of the complexion, the fine texture of the hair, and the softness of the beard, which fell in waves over his throat to his breast, never a soldier but would have laughed at him in encounter, never a woman who would not have confided in him at sight, never a child that would not, with quick instinct, have given him its hand and whole artless trust; nor might any one have said he was not beautiful.

The features, it should be further said, were ruled by a certain expression which, as the viewer chose, might with equal correctness have been called the effect of intelligence, love, pity, or sorrow; though, in better speech, it was a blending of them all—a look easy to



fancy as a mark of a sinless soul doomed to the sight and understanding of the utter sinfulness of those among whom it was passing ; yet withal no one could have observed the face with a thought of weakness in the man ; so, at least, would not they who know that the qualities mentioned—love, sorrow, pity—are the results of a consciousness of strength to bear suffering oftener than strength to do ; such has been the might of martyrs and devotees and the myriads written down in saintly calendars. And such, indeed, was the air of this one.

Slowly he drew near—nearer the three.

Now Ben-Hur, mounted and spear in hand, was an object to claim the glance of a king ; yet the eyes of the man approaching were all the time raised above him—and not to Iras, whose loveliness has been so often remarked, but to Balthasar, the old and unserviceable.

The hush was profound.

Presently the Nazarite, still pointing with his staff, cried, in a loud voice,

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world !”

The many standing still, arrested by the action of the speaker, and listening for what might follow, were struck with awe by words so strange and past their understanding ; upon Balthasar they were overpowering. He was there to see once more the Redeemer of men. The faith which had brought him the singular privileges of the time long gone abode yet in his heart ; and if now it gave him a power of

vision above that of his fellows—a power to see and know him for whom he was looking—better than calling the power a miracle, let it be thought of as the faculty of a soul not yet entirely released from the divine relations to which it had been formerly admitted, or as the fitting reward of a life in that age so without examples of holiness—a life itself a miracle. The ideal of his faith was before him, perfect in face, form, dress, action, age; and he was in its view, and the view was recognition. Ah, now if something should happen to identify the stranger beyond all doubt!

And that was what did happen.

Exactly at the fitting moment, as if to assure the trembling Egyptian, the Nazarite repeated the outcry.

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!”

Balthasar fell upon his knees. For him there was no need of explanation; and as if the Nazarite knew it, he turned to those more immediately about him staring in wonder, and continued:

“This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him,



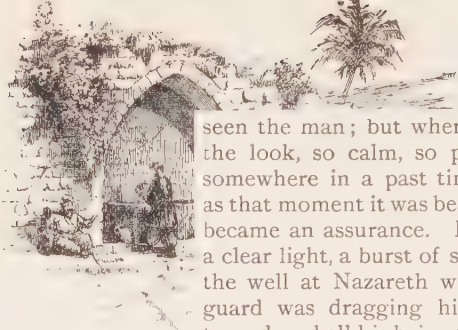


the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and bare record, that this"—he paused, his staff still pointing at the stranger in the white garments, as if to give a more absolute certainty to both his words and the conclusions intended—"I bare record, that this is the SON OF GOD!"

"It is he, it is he!" Balthasar cried, with up-raised tearful eyes. Next moment he sank down insensible.

In this time, it should be remembered, Ben-Hur was studying the face of the stranger, though with an interest entirely different. He was not insensible to its purity of feature, and its thoughtfulness, tenderness, humility, and holiness, but just then there was room in his mind for but one thought—Who is this man? And what? Messiah or king? Never was apparition more unroyal. Nay, looking at that calm, benignant countenance, the very idea of war and conquest, and lust of dominion, smote him like a profanation. He said, as if speaking to his own heart, Balthasar must be right and Simonides wrong. This man has not come to rebuild the throne of Solomon; he has neither the nature nor the genius of Herod; king he may be, but not of another and greater than Rome.

It should be understood now that this was not a conclusion with Ben-Hur, but an impression merely; and while it was forming, while yet he gazed at the wonderful countenance, his memory began to throe and struggle. "Surely," he said to himself, "I have



seen the man; but where and when?" That the look, so calm, so pitiful, so loving, had somewhere in a past time beamed upon him as that moment it was beaming upon Balthasar became an assurance. Faintly at first, at last a clear light, a burst of sunshine the scene by the well at Nazareth what time the Roman guard was dragging him to the galleys returned, and all his being thrilled. Those hands had helped him when he was perishing. The face was one of the pictures he had carried in mind ever since. In the effusion of feeling excited, the explanation of the preacher was lost by him, all but the last words—words so marvellous that the world yet rings with them: "—this is the SON OF GOD!"

Ben-Hur leaped from his horse to render homage to his benefactor; but Iras cried to him, "Help, son of Hur, help, or my father will die!"

He stopped, looked back, then hurried to her assistance. She gave him a cup; and leaving the slave to bring the camel to its knees, he ran to the river for water. The stranger was gone when he came back.

At last Balthasar was restored to consciousness. Stretching forth his hands he asked, feebly, "Where is he?"

"Who?" asked Iras.

An intense instant interest shone upon the good man's face, as if a last wish had been gratified, and he answered,

"He—the Redeemer—the Son of God, whom I have seen again."

"Believest thou so?" Iras asked in a low voice of Ben-Hur.

"The time is full of wonders; let us wait," was all he said.

And next day while the three were listening to him, the Nazarite broke off in mid-speech, saying, reverently, "Behold the Lamb of God!"

Looking to where he pointed, they beheld the stranger again. As Ben-Hur surveyed the slender figure, and holy beautiful countenance compassionate to sadness, a new idea broke upon him.

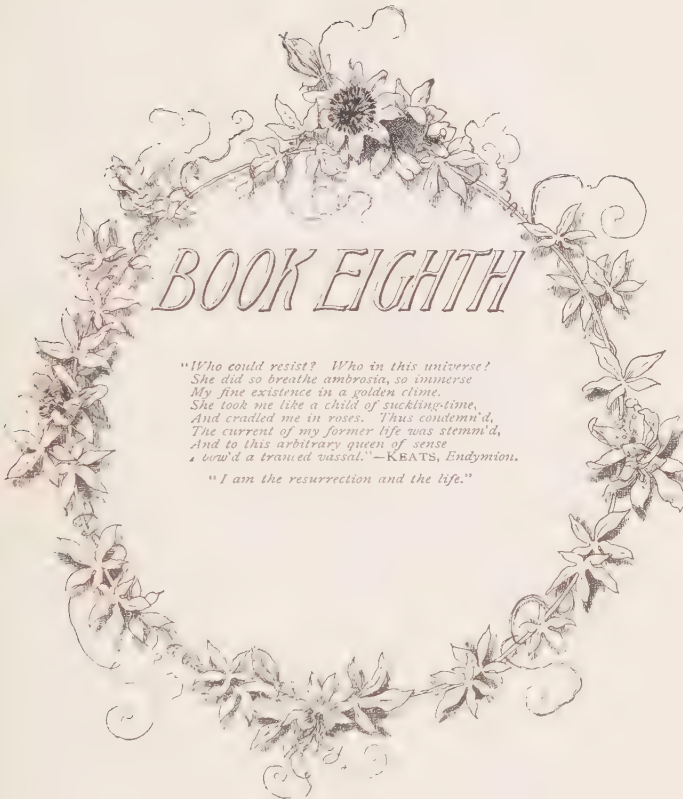
"Balthasar is right—so is Simonides. May not the Redeemer be a king also?"

And he asked one at his side, "Who is the man walking yonder?"

The other laughed mockingly, and replied,

"He is the son of a carpenter over in Nazareth."

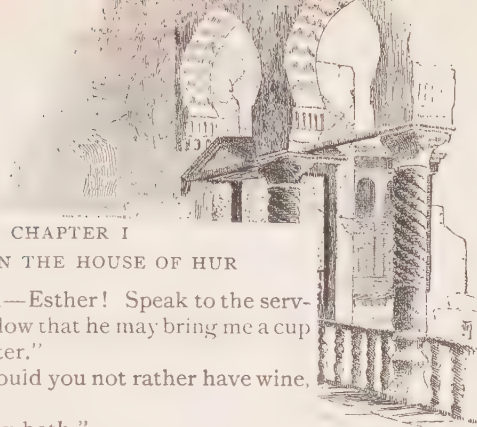




BOOK EIGHTH

*"Who could resist? Who in this universe?
She did so breathe ambrosia, so immerse
My fine existence in a golden clime.
She took me like a child of suckling-time,
And cradled me in roses. Thus condemn'd,
The current of my former life was stemm'd,
And to this arbitrary queen of sense
I bow'd a tranced vassal."*—KEATS, *Endymion*.

"I am the resurrection and the life."



CHAPTER I

GUESTS IN THE HOUSE OF HUR



ESTHER—Esther! Speak to the servant below that he may bring me a cup of water."

"Would you not rather have wine, father?"

"Let him bring both."

This was in the summer-house upon the roof of the old palace of the Hurs of Jerusalem. From the parapet overlooking the court-yard Esther called to a man in waiting there; at the same moment another man-servant came up and saluted respectfully.

"A package for the master," he said, giving her a letter enclosed in linen cloth, tied and sealed.

For the satisfaction of the reader, we stop to say that it is the twenty-first day of March, nearly three years after the annunciation of the Christ at Bethabara.

In the mean while, Malluch, acting for Ben-Hur, who could no longer endure the emptiness and decay of his father's house, had bought it from Pontius Pilate; and, in process of repair, gates, courts, lewens, stair-ways, terraces, rooms, and roof had been cleansed and thoroughly restored; not only was there no reminder left of the tragic circumstances so ruinous to the family, but the refurnishment was

in a style richer than before. At every point, indeed, a visitor was met by evidences of the higher tastes acquired by the young proprietor during his years of residence in the villa by Misenum and in the Roman capital.

Now it should not be inferred from this explanation that Ben-Hur had publicly assumed ownership of the property. In his opinion, the hour for that was not yet come. Neither had he yet taken his proper name. Passing the time in the labors of preparation in Galilee, he waited patiently the action of the Nazarene, who became daily more and more a mystery to him, and by prodigies done, often before his eyes, kept him in a state of anxious doubt both as to his character and mission. Occasionally he came up to the Holy City, stopping at the paternal house; always, however, as a stranger and a guest.

These visits of Ben-Hur, it should also be observed, were far more than mere rest from labor. Balthasar and Iras made their home in the palace; and the charm of the daughter was still upon him with all its original freshness, while the father, though feebler in body, held him an unflagging listener to speeches of astonishing power, urging the divinity of the wandering miracle-worker of whom they were all so expectant.

As to Simonides and Esther, they had arrived from Antioch only a few days before this their reappearance—a wearisome journey to the merchant, borne, as he had been, in a palanquin swung between two camels, which, in their





careening, did not always keep the same step. But now that he was come, the good man, it seemed, could not see enough of his native land. He delighted in the perch upon the roof, and spent most of his day hours there seated in an arm-chair, the duplicate of that one kept for him in the cabinet over the storehouse by the Orontes. In the shade of the summer-house he could drink fully of the inspiring air lying lightly upon the familiar hills; he could better watch the sun rise, run its course, and set as it used to in the far-gone, not a habit lost; and with Esther by him it was so much easier up there close to the sky, to bring back the other Esther, his love in youth, his wife, dearer growing with the passage of years. And yet he was not unmindful of business. Every day a messenger brought him a despatch from Sanballat, in charge of the big commerce behind; and every day a despatch left him for Sanballat with directions of such minuteness of detail as to exclude all judgment save his own, and all chances except those the Almighty has refused to submit to the most mindful of men.

As Esther started in return to the summer-house, the sunlight fell softly upon the dustless roof, showing her a woman now—small, graceful in form, of regular features, rosy with youth and health, bright with intelligence, beautiful with the outshining of a devoted nature—a woman to be loved because loving was a habit of life irrepressible with her.

She looked at the package as she turned, paused, looked at it a second time more closely

than at first; and the blood rose reddening her cheeks—the seal was Ben-Hur's. With quickened steps she hastened on.

Simonides held the package a moment while he also inspected the seal. Breaking it open, he gave her the roll it contained.

"Read," he said.

His eyes were upon her as he spoke, and instantly a troubled expression fell upon his own face.

"You know who it is from, I see, Esther."

"Yes—from—our master."

Though the manner was halting, she met his gaze with modest sincerity. Slowly his chin sank into the roll of flesh puffed out under it like a cushion.

"You love him, Esther," he said, quietly.

"Yes," she answered.

"Have you thought well of what you do?"

"I have tried not to think of him, father, except as the master to whom I am dutifully bound. The effort has not helped me to strength."

"A good girl, a good girl, even as thy mother was," he said, dropping into reverie, from which she roused him by unrolling the paper.

"The Lord forgive me, but—but thy love might not have been vainly given had I kept fast hold of all I had, as I might have done—such power is there in money!"

"It would have been worse for me had you done so, father; for then I had been unworthy a look from him, and without pride in you. Shail I not read now?"



"In a moment," he said. "Let me, for your sake, my child, show you the worst. Seeing it with me may make it less terrible to you. His love, Esther, is all bestowed."

"I know it," she said, calmly.

"The Egyptian has him in her net," he continued. "She has the cunning of her race, with beauty to help her—much beauty, great cunning; but, like her race again, no heart. The daughter who despises her father will bring her husband to grief."

"Does she that?"

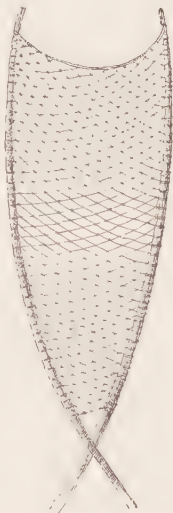
Simonides went on:

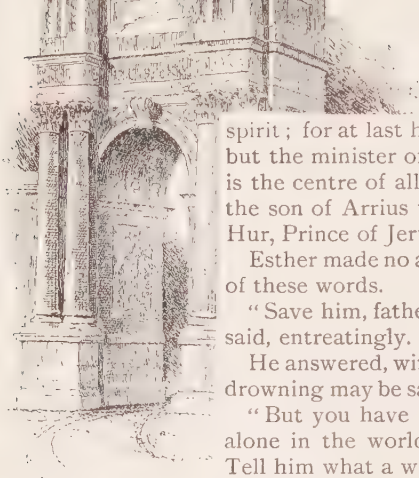
"Balthasar is a wise man who has been wonderfully favored for a Gentile, and his faith becomes him; yet she makes a jest of it. I heard her say, speaking of him yesterday, 'The follies of youth are excusable; nothing is admirable in the aged except wisdom, and when that goes from them, they should die.' A cruel speech, fit for a Roman. I applied it to myself, knowing a feebleness like her father's will come to me also—nay, it is not far off. But you, Esther, will never say of me—no, never—'It were better he were dead.' No, your mother was a daughter of Judah."

With half-formed tears, she kissed him, and said, "I am my mother's child."

"Yes, and my daughter—my daughter, who is to me all the Temple was to Solomon."

After a silence, he laid his hand upon her shoulder, and resumed: "When he has taken the Egyptian to wife, Esther, he will think of you with repentance and much calling of the





spirit ; for at last he will awake to find himself but the minister of her bad ambition. Rome is the centre of all her dreams. To her he is the son of Arrius the duumvir, not the son of Hur, Prince of Jerusalem."

Esther made no attempt to conceal the effect of these words.

"Save him, father! It is not too late!" she said, entreatingly.

He answered, with a dubious smile, "A man drowning may be saved ; not so a man in love."

"But you have influence with him. He is alone in the world. Show him his danger. Tell him what a woman she is."

"That might save him from her. Would it give him to you, Esther? No," and his brows fell darkly over his eyes. "I am a servant, as my fathers were for generations ; yet I could not say to him, 'Lo, master, my daughter! She is fairer than the Egyptian, and loves thee better!' I have caught too much from years of liberty and direction. The words would blister my tongue. The stones upon the old hills yonder would turn in their beds for shame when I go out to them. No, by the patriarchs, Esther, I would rather lay us both with your mother to sleep as she sleeps!"

A blush burned Esther's whole face.

"I did not mean you to tell him so, father. I was concerned for him alone—for his happiness, not mine. Because I have dared love him, I shall keep myself worthy his respect ; so only can I excuse my folly. Let me read his letter now."

"Yes, read it."

She began at once, in haste to conclude the distasteful subject.

"Nisan, 8th day.

"On the road from Galilee to Jerusalem.

"The Nazarene is on the way also. With him, though without his knowledge, I am bringing a full legion of mine. A second legion follows. The Pass-over will excuse the multitude. He said upon setting out, 'We will go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning me shall be accomplished.'

"Our waiting draws to an end.

"In haste.

"Peace to thee, Simonides.

BEN-HUR."

Esther returned the letter to her father, while a choking sensation gathered in her throat. There was not a word in the missive for her—not even in the salutation had she a share—and it would have been so easy to have written "and to thine, peace." For the first time in her life she felt the smart of a jealous sting.

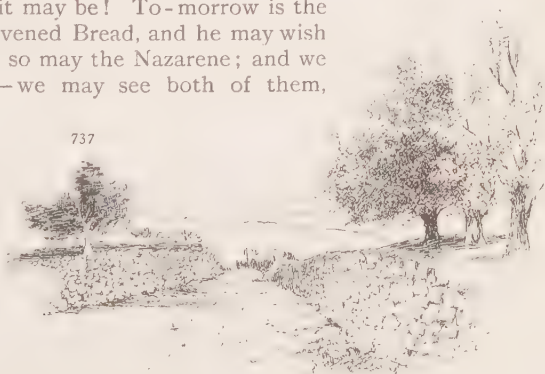
"The eighth day," said Simonides, "the eighth day; and this, Esther, this is the—"

"The ninth," she replied.

"Ah, then, they may be in Bethany now."

"And possibly we may see him to-night," she added, pleased into momentary forgetfulness.

"It may be, it may be! To-morrow is the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and he may wish to celebrate it; so may the Nazarene; and we may see him—we may see both of them, Esther."



At this point the servant appeared with the wine and water. Esther helped her father, and in the midst of the service Iras came upon the roof.

To the Jewess the Egyptian never appeared so very, very beautiful as at that moment. Her gauzy garments fluttered about her like a little cloud of mist; her forehead, neck, and arms glittered with the massive jewelry so affected by her people. Her countenance was suffused with pleasure. She moved with buoyant steps, and self-conscious, though without affectation. Esther at the sight shrank within herself, and nestled closer to her father.

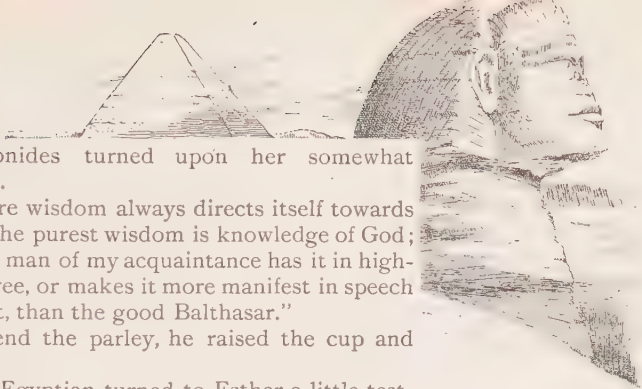
"Peace to you, Simonides, and to the pretty Esther peace," said Iras, inclining her head to the latter. "You remind me, good master—if I may say it without offence—you remind me of the priests in Persia who climb their temples at the decline of day to send prayers after the departing sun. Is there anything in the worship you do not know, let me call my father. He is Magian-bred."

"Fair Egyptian," the merchant replied, nodding with grave politeness, "your father is a good man who would not be offended if he knew I told you his Persian lore is the least part of his wisdom."

Iras's lip curled slightly.

"To speak like a philosopher, as you invite me," she said, "the least part always implies a greater. Let me ask what you esteem the greater part of the rare quality you are pleased to attribute to him."





Simonides turned upon her somewhat sternly.

"Pure wisdom always directs itself towards God; the purest wisdom is knowledge of God; and no man of my acquaintance has it in higher degree, or makes it more manifest in speech and act, than the good Balthasar."

To end the parley, he raised the cup and drank.

The Egyptian turned to Esther a little testily.

"A man who has millions in store, and fleets of ships at sea, cannot discern in what simple women like us find amusement. Let us leave him. By the wall yonder we can talk."

They went to the parapet then, stopping at the place where, years before, Ben-Hur loosed the broken tile upon the head of Gratus.

"You have not been to Rome?" Iras began, toying the while with one of her unclasped bracelets.

"No," said Esther, demurely.

"Have you not wished to go?"

"No."

"Ah, how little there has been of your life!"

The sigh that succeeded the exclamation could not have been more piteously expressive had the loss been the Egyptian's own. Next moment her laugh might have been heard in the street below; and she said, "Oh, oh, my pretty simpleton! The half-fledged birds nested in the ear of the great bust out on the Memphian sands know nearly as much as you."

Then, seeing Esther's confusion, she changed



her manner, and said in a confiding tone, "You must not take offence. Oh no! I was playing. Let me kiss the hurt, and tell you what I would not to any other—not if Simbel himself asked it of me, offering a lotus-cup of the spray of the Nile!"

Another laugh, masking excellently the look she turned sharply upon the Jewess, and she said, "The King is coming."

Esther gazed at her in innocent surprise.

"The Nazarene," Iras continued—"he whom our fathers have been talking about so much, whom Ben-Hur has been serving and toiling for so long"—her voice dropped several tones lower—"the Nazarene will be here to-morrow, and Ben-Hur to-night."

Esther struggled to maintain her composure, but failed: her eyes fell, the tell-tale blood surged to her cheek and forehead, and she was saved sight of the triumphant smile that passed, like a gleam, over the face of the Egyptian.

"See, here is his promise."

And from her girdle she took a roll.

"Rejoice with me, O my friend! He will be here to-night! On the Tiber there is a house, a royal property, which he has pledged to me; and to be its mistress is to be—"

A sound of some one walking swiftly along the street below interrupted the speech, and she leaned over the parapet to see. Then she drew back, and cried, with hands clasped above her head, "Now blessed be Isis! 'Tis he—Ben-Hur himself! That he should appear while I had such thought of him! There are no gods

if it be not a good omen. Put your arms about me, Esther—and a kiss!"

The Jewess looked up. Upon each cheek there was a glow; her eyes sparkled with a light more nearly of anger than ever her nature emitted before. Her gentleness had been too roughly overridden. It was not enough for her to be forbidden more than fugitive dreams of the man she loved; a boastful rival must tell her in confidence of her better success, and of the brilliant promises which were its rewards. Of her, the servant of a servant, there had been no hint of remembrance; this other could show his letter, leaving her to imagine all it breathed. So she said,

"Dost thou love him so much, then, or Rome so much better."

The Egyptian drew back a step; then she bent her haughty head quite near the questioner.

"What is he to thee, daughter of Simonides?"

Esther, all thrilling, began, "He is my—"

A thought blasting as lightning stayed the words: she paled, trembled, recovered, and answered,

"He is my father's friend."

Her tongue had refused to admit her servile condition.

Iras laughed more lightly than before.

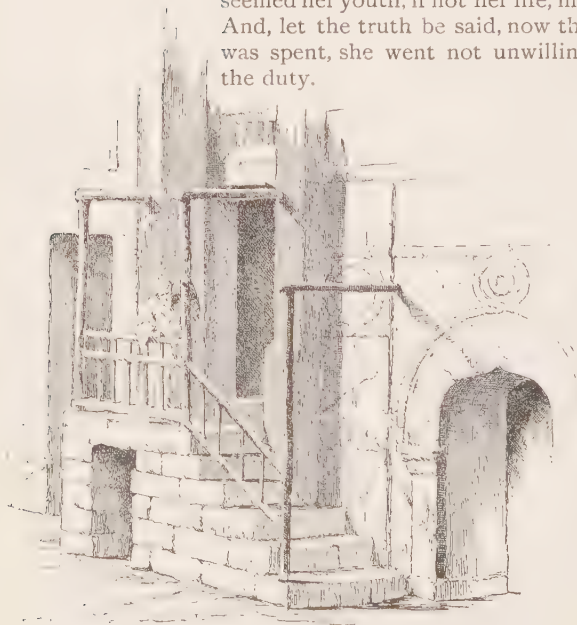
"Not more than that?" she said. "Ah, by the lover-gods of Egypt, thou mayst keep thy kisses—keep them. Thou hast taught me but



now that there are others vastly more estimable waiting me here in Judea; and"—she turned away, looking back over her shoulder—"I will go get them. Peace to thee."

Esther saw her disappear down the steps, when, putting her hands over her face, she burst into tears so they ran scalding through her fingers—tears of shame and choking passion. And, to deepen the paroxysm to her even temper so strange, up with a new meaning of withering force rose her father's words—"Thy love might not have been vainly given had I kept fast hold of all I had, as I might have done."

And all the stars were out, burning low above the city and the dark wall of mountains about it, before she recovered enough to go back to the summer-house, and in silence take her accustomed place at her father's side, humbly waiting his pleasure. To such duty it seemed her youth, if not her life, must be given. And, let the truth be said, now that the pang was spent, she went not unwillingly back to the duty.





BAZAR: TOWARDS EVENING



CHAPTER II

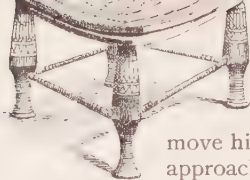
BEN-HUR TELLS OF THE NAZARENE



AN hour or thereabouts after the scene upon the roof, Balthasar and Simonides, the latter attended by Esther, met in the great chamber of the palace; and while they were talking, Ben-Hur and Iras came in together.

The young Jew, advancing in front of his companion, walked first to Balthasar, and saluted him, and received his reply; then he turned to Simonides, but paused at sight of Esther.

It is not often we have hearts roomy enough for more than one of the absorbing passions at the same time; in its blaze the others may continue to live, but only as lesser lights. So with Ben-Hur, much study of possibilities, indulgence of hopes and dreams, influences born of the condition of his country, influences more direct—that of Iras, for example—had made him in the broadest worldly sense ambitious; and as he had given the passion place, allowing it to become a rule, and finally an imperious governor, the resolves and impulses of former days faded imperceptibly out of being, and at last almost out of recollection. It is at best so easy to forget our youth; in his case it was but natural that his own sufferings and the mystery darkening the fate of his family should



move him less and less as, in hope at least, he approached nearer and nearer the goals which occupied all his visions. Only let us not judge him too harshly.

He paused in surprise at seeing Esther a woman now, and so beautiful; and as he stood looking at her a still voice reminded him of broken vows and duties undone: almost his old self returned.

For an instant he was startled; but recovering, he went to Esther, and said, "Peace to thee, sweet Esther—peace; and thou, Simonides"—he looked to the merchant as he spoke—"the blessing of the Lord be thine, if only because thou hast been a good father to the fatherless."

Esther heard him with downcast face; Simonides answered,

"I repeat the welcome of the good Balthasar, son of Hur—welcome to thy father's house and sit, and tell us of thy travels, and of thy work, and of the wonderful Nazarene—who he is, and what. If thou art not at ease here, who shall be? Sit, I pray—there, between us, that we may all hear."

Esther stepped out quickly and brought a covered stool, and set it for him.

"Thanks," he said to her, gratefully.

When seated, after some other conversation, he addressed himself to the men.

"I have come to tell you of the Nazarene."

The two became instantly attentive.

"For many days now I have followed him with such watchfulness as one may give an-

other upon whom he is waiting so anxiously. I have seen him under all circumstances said to be trials and tests of men; and while I am certain he is a man as I am, not less certain am I that he is something more."

"What more?" asked Simonides.

"I will tell you—"

Some one coming into the room interrupted him; he turned, and arose with extended hands.

"Amrah! Dear old Amrah!" he cried.

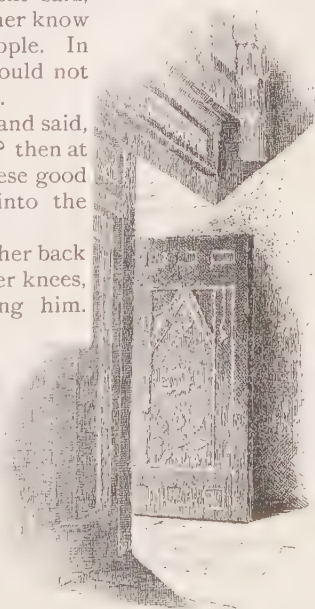
She came forward; and they, seeing the joy in her face, thought not once how wrinkled and tawny it was. She knelt at his feet, clasped his knees, and kissed his hands over and over; and when he could he put the lank gray hair from her cheeks, and kissed them, saying, "Good Amrah, have you nothing, nothing of them—not a word—not one little sign?"

Then she broke into sobbing which made him answer plainer even than the spoken word.

"God's will has been done," he next said, solemnly, in a tone to make each listener know he had no hope more of finding his people. In his eyes there were tears which he would not have them see, because he was a man.

When he could again, he took seat, and said, "Come, sit by me, Amrah—here. No? then at my feet; for I have much to say to these good friends of a wonderful man come into the world."

But she went off, and stooping with her back to the wall, joined her hands before her knees, content, they all thought, with seeing him.



Then Ben-Hur, bowing to the old men, began again :

"I fear to answer the question asked me about the Nazarene without first telling you some of the things I have seen him do ; and to that I am the more inclined, my friends, because to-morrow he will come to the city, and go up into the Temple, which he calls his father's house, where, it is further said, he will proclaim himself. So, whether you are right, O Balthasar, or you, Simonides, we and Israel shall know to-morrow."

Balthasar rubbed his hands tremulously together, and asked, "Where shall I go to see him?"

"The pressure of the crowd will be very great. Better, I think, that you all go upon the roof above the cloisters—say upon the porch of Solomon."

"Can you be with us?"

"No," said Ben-Hur, "my friends will require me, perhaps, in the procession."

"Procession!" exclaimed Simonides. "Does he travel in state?"

Ben-Hur saw the argument in mind.

"He brings twelve men with him, fishermen, tillers of the soil, one a publican, all of the humbler class ; and he and they make their journeys on foot, careless of wind, cold, rain, or sun. Seeing them stop by the way-side at nightfall to break bread or lie down to sleep, I have been reminded of a party of shepherds going back to their flocks from market, not of nobles and kings. Only when he lifts the corners of his handkerchief to look at some one



or shake the dust from his head, I am made know he is their teacher as well as their companion—their superior not less than their friend.

"You are shrewd men," Ben-Hur resumed, after a pause. "You know what creatures of certain master motives we are, and that it has become little less than a law of our nature to spend life in eager pursuit of certain objects; now, appealing to that law as something by which we may know ourselves, what would you say of a man who could be rich by making gold of the stones under his feet, yet is poor of choice?"

"The Greeks would call him a philosopher," said Iras.

"Nay, daughter," said Balthasar, "the philosophers had never the power to do such thing."

"How know you this man has?"

Ben-Hur answered quickly, "I saw him turn water into wine."

"Very strange, very strange," said Simonides; "but it is not so strange to me as that he should prefer to live poor when he could be so rich. Is he so poor?"

"He owns nothing, and envies nobody his owning. He pities the rich. But passing that, what would you say to see a man multiply seven loaves and two fishes, all his store, into enough to feed five thousand people, and have full baskets over? That I saw the Nazarene do."

"You saw it?" exclaimed Simonides.

"Aye, and ate of the bread and fish."

"More marvellous still," Ben-Hur contin-



ued, "what would you say of a man in whom there is such healing virtue that the sick have but to touch the hem of his garment to be cured, or cry to him afar? That, too, I witnessed, not once, but many times. As we came out of Jericho two blind men by the way-side called to the Nazarene, and he touched their eyes, and they saw. So they brought a palsied man to him, and he said merely, 'Go unto thy house,' and the man went away well. What say you to these things?"

The merchant had no answer.

"Think you now, as I have heard others argue, that what I have told you are tricks of jugglery? Let me answer by recalling greater things which I have seen him do. Look first to that curse of God—comfortless, as you all know, except by death—leprosy."

At these words Amrah dropped her hands to the floor, and in her eagerness to hear him half arose.

"What would you say," said Ben-Hur, with increased earnestness—"what would you say to have seen that I now tell you? A leper came to the Nazarene while I was with him down in Galilee, and said, 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.' He heard the cry, and touched the outcast with his hand, saying, 'Be thou clean;' and forthwith the man was himself again, healthful as any of us who beheld the cure, and we were a multitude."

Here Amrah arose, and with her gaunt fingers held the wiry locks from her eyes. The brain of the poor creature had long since gone



to heart, and she was troubled to follow the speech.

"Then, again," said Ben-Hur, without stop, "ten lepers came to him one day in a body, and, falling at his feet, called out—I saw and heard it all—called out, 'Master, Master, have mercy upon us!' He told them, 'Go, show yourselves to the priest, as the law requires; and before you are come there ye shall be healed.'"

"And were they?"

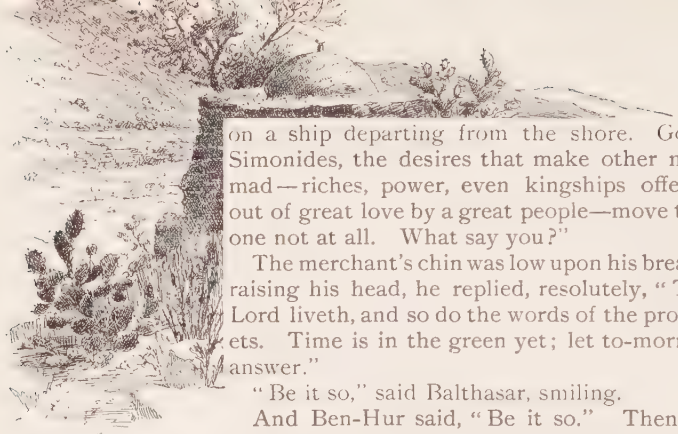
"Yes. On the road going their infirmity left them, so that there was nothing to remind us of it except their polluted clothes."

"Such thing was never heard before—never in all Israel!" said Simonides, in undertone.

And then, while he was speaking, Amrah turned away, and walked noiselessly to the door, and went out; and none of the company saw her go.

"The thoughts stirred by such things done under my eyes I leave you to imagine," said Ben-Hur, continuing; "but my doubts, my misgivings, my amazement, were not yet at the full. The people of Galilee are, as you know, impetuous and rash; after years of waiting their swords burned their hands; nothing would do them but action. 'He is slow to declare himself; let us force him,' they cried to me. And I too became impatient. If he is to be king, why not now? The legions are ready. So as he was once teaching by the sea-side we would have crowned him whether or not; but he disappeared, and was next seen





on a ship departing from the shore. Good Simonides, the desires that make other men mad—riches, power, even kingships offered out of great love by a great people—move this one not at all. What say you?"

The merchant's chin was low upon his breast; raising his head, he replied, resolutely, "The Lord liveth, and so do the words of the prophets. Time is in the green yet; let to-morrow answer."

"Be it so," said Balthasar, smiling.

And Ben-Hur said, "Be it so." Then he went on: "But I have not yet done. From these things, not too great to be above suspicion by such as did not see them in performance as I did, let me carry you now to others infinitely greater, acknowledged since the world began to be past the power of man. Tell me, has any one to your knowledge ever reached out and taken from Death what Death has made his own? Who ever gave again the breath of a life lost? Who but—"

"God!" said Balthasar, reverently.

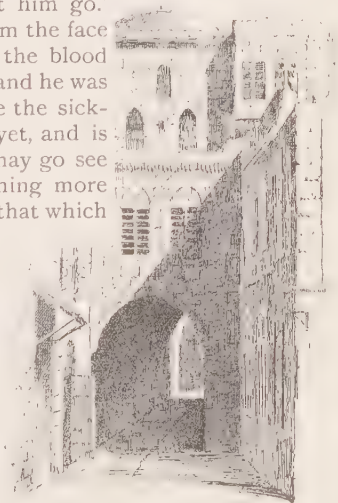
Ben-Hur bowed.

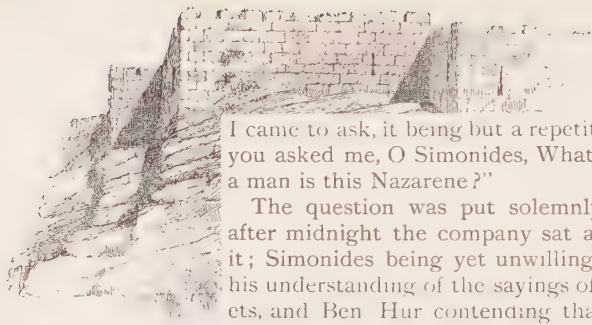
"O wise Egyptian! I may not refuse the name you lend me. What would you—or you, Simonides—what would you either or both have said had you seen as I did, a man, with few words and no ceremony, without effort more than a mother's when she speaks to wake her child asleep, undo the work of Death? It was down at Nain. We were about going into the gate, when a company came out bearing a dead man. The Nazarene

stopped to let the train pass. There was a woman among them crying. I saw his face soften with pity. He spoke to her, then went and touched the bier, and said to him who lay upon it dressed for burial, 'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise!' And instantly the dead sat up and talked."

"God only is so great," said Balthasar to Simonides.

"Mark you," Ben-Hur proceeded, "I do but tell you things of which I was a witness, together with a cloud of other men. On the way hither I saw another act still more mighty. In Bethany there was a man named Lazarus, who died and was buried; and after he had lain four days in a tomb, shut in by a great stone, the Nazarene was shown to the place. Upon rolling the stone away, we beheld the man lying inside bound and rotting. There were many people standing by, and we all heard what the Nazarene said, for he spoke in a loud voice: 'Lazarus, come forth!' I cannot tell you my feelings when in answer, as it were, the man arose and came out to us with all his cerements about him. 'Loose him,' said the Nazarene next—'loose him, and let him go.' And when the napkin was taken from the face of the resurrected, lo, my friends! the blood ran anew through the wasted body, and he was exactly as he had been in life before the sickness that took him off. He lives yet, and is hourly seen and spoken to. You may go see him to-morrow. And now, as nothing more is needed for the purpose, I ask you that which





I came to ask, it being but a repetition of what you asked me, O Simonides, What more than a man is this Nazarene?"

The question was put solemnly, and long after midnight the company sat and debated it; Simonides being yet unwilling to give up his understanding of the sayings of the prophets, and Ben Hur contending that the elder disputants were both right — that the Nazarene was the Redeemer, as claimed by Balthasar, and also the destined king the merchant would have.

"To-morrow we will see. Peace to you all."

So saying, Ben-Hur took his leave, intending to return to Bethany.

CHAPTER III

THE LEPERS LEAVE THEIR TOMB

THE first person to go out of the city upon the opening of the Sheep's Gate next morning was Amrah, basket on arm. No questions were asked her by the keepers, since the morning itself had not been more regular in coming than she; they knew her somebody's faithful servant, and that was enough for them.

Down the eastern valley she took her way. The side of Olivet, darkly green, was spotted with white tents recently put up by people attending the feasts; the hour, however, was too early for the strangers to be abroad; still, had it not been so, no one would have troubled

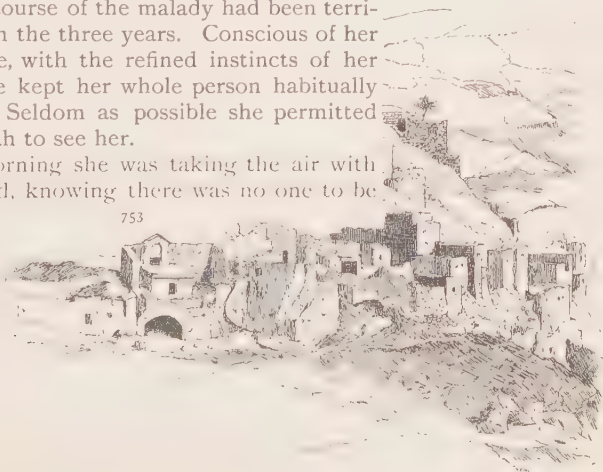
her. Past Gethsemane ; past the tombs at the meeting of the Bethany roads : past the sepulchral village of Siloam she went. Occasionally the decrepit little body staggered ; once she sat down to get her breath , rising shortly, she struggled on with renewed haste. The great rocks on either hand, if they had had ears, might have heard her mutter to herself ; could they have seen, it would have been to observe how frequently she looked up over the Mount, reproving the dawn for its promptness ; if it had been possible for them to gossip, not improbably they would have said to each other, " Our friend is in a hurry this morning ; the mouths she goes to feed must be very hungry."

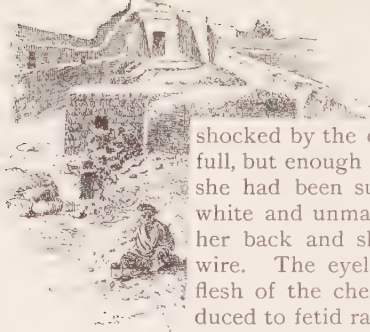
When at last she reached the King's Garden she slackened her gait ; for then the grim city of the lepers was in view, extending far round the pitted south hill of Hinnom.

As the reader must by this time have surmised, she was going to her mistress, whose tomb, it will be remembered, overlooked the well En-Rogel.

Early as it was, the unhappy woman was up and sitting outside, leaving Tirzah asleep within. The course of the malady had been terribly swift in the three years. Conscious of her appearance, with the refined instincts of her nature, she kept her whole person habitually covered. Seldom as possible she permitted even Tirzah to see her.

This morning she was taking the air with bared head, knowing there was no one to be



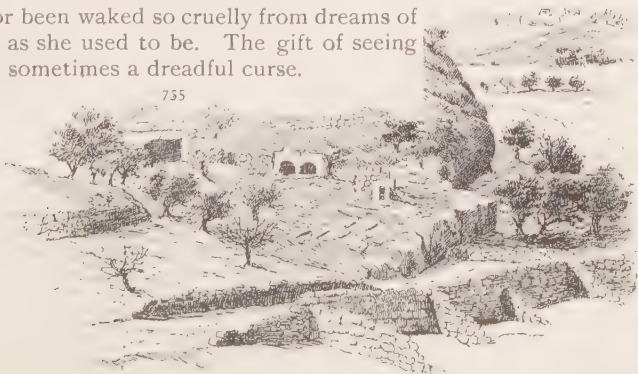


shocked by the exposure. The light was not full, but enough to show the ravages to which she had been subject. Her hair was snow-white and unmanageably coarse, falling over her back and shoulders like so much silver wire. The eyelids, the lips, the nostrils, the flesh of the cheeks, were either gone or reduced to fetid rawness. The neck was a mass of ash-colored scales. One hand lay outside the folds of her habit rigid as that of a skeleton; the nails had been eaten away; the joints of the fingers, if not bare to the bone, were swollen knots crusted with red secretion. Head, face, neck, and hand indicated all too plainly the condition of the whole body. Seeing her thus, it was easy to understand how the once fair widow of the princely Hur had been able to maintain her incognito so well through such a period of years.

When the sun would gild the crest of Olivet and the Mount of Offence with light sharper and more brilliant in that old land than in the West, she knew Amrah would come, first to the well, then to a stone midway the well and the foot of the hill on which she had her abode, and that the good servant would there deposit the food she carried in the basket, and fill the water-jar afresh for the day. Of her former plenitude of happiness, that brief visit was all that remained to the unfortunate. She could then ask about her son, and be told of his welfare, with such bits of news concerning him as the messenger could glean. Usually the information was meagre enough, yet comforting;

at times she heard he was at home ; then she would issue from her dreary cell at break of day, and sit till noon, and from noon to set of sun, a motionless figure draped in white, looking, statue-like, invariably to one point—over the Temple to the spot under the rounded sky where the old house stood, dear in memory, and dearer because he was there. Nothing else was left her. Tirzah she counted of the dead ; and as for herself, she simply waited the end, knowing every hour of life was an hour of dying—happily, of painless dying.

The things of nature about the hill to keep her sensitive to the world's attractions were wretchedly scant ; beasts and birds avoided the place as if they knew its history and present use ; every green thing perished in its first season ; the winds warred upon the shrubs and venturous grasses, leaving to drought such as they could not uproot. Look where she would, the view was made depressingly suggestive by tombs—tombs above her, tombs below, tombs opposite her own tomb—all now freshly whitened in warning to visiting pilgrims. In the sky—clear, fair, inviting—one would think she might have found some relief to her ache of mind ; but, alas ! in making the beautiful elsewhere the sun served her never so unfriendly—it did but disclose her growing hideousness. But for the sun she would not have been the horror she was to herself, nor been waked so cruelly from dreams of Tirzah as she used to be. The gift of seeing can be sometimes a dreadful curse.



Does one ask why she did not make an end to her sufferings?

THE LAW FORBADE HER!

A Gentile may smile at the answer; but so will not a son of Israel.

While she sat there peopling the dusky solitude with thoughts even more cheerless, suddenly a woman came up the hill staggering and spent with exertion.

The widow arose hastily, and, covering her head, cried, in a voice unnaturally harsh, "Unclean, unclean!"

In a moment, heedless of the notice, Amrah was at her feet. All the long-pent love of the simple creature burst forth: with tears and passionate exclamations she kissed her mistress's garments, and for a while the latter strove to escape from her; then, seeing she could not, she waited till the violence of the paroxysm was over.

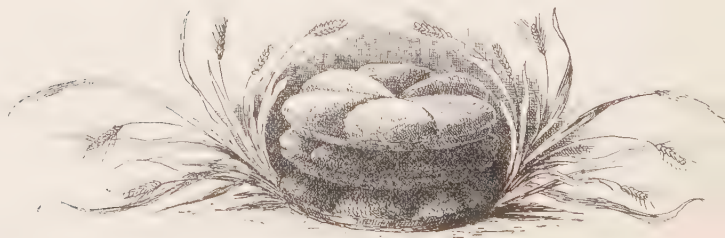
"What have you done, Amrah?" she said. "Is it by such disobedience you prove your love for us? Wicked woman! You are lost; and he—your master—you can never, never go back to him."

Amrah grovelled sobbing in the dust.

"The ban of the Law is upon you, too; you cannot return to Jerusalem. What will become of us? Who will bring us bread? O wicked, wicked Amrah! We are all, all undone alike!"

"Mercy, mercy!" Amrah answered, from the ground.

"You should have been merciful to yourself, and by so doing been most merciful to us. Now





where can we fly? There is no one to help us. O false servant! The wrath of the Lord was already too heavy upon us."

Here Tirzah, awakened by the noise, appeared at the door of the tomb. The pen shrinks from the picture she presented. In the half-clad apparition, patched with scales, lividly seamed, nearly blind, its limbs and extremities swollen to grotesque largeness, familiar eyes however sharpened by love could not have recognized the creature of childish grace and purity we first beheld her.

"Is it Amrah, mother?"

The servant tried to crawl to her also.

"Stay, Amrah!" the widow cried, imperiously. "I forbid you touching her. Rise, and get you gone before any at the well see you here. Nay, I forgot—it is too late! You must remain now and share our doom. Rise, I say!"

Amrah rose to her knees, and said, brokenly and with clasped hands, "O good mistress! I am not false—I am not wicked. I bring you good tidings."

"Of Judah?" and as she spoke, the widow half withdrew the cloth from her head.

"There is a wonderful man," Amrah continued, "who has power to cure you. He speaks a word, and the sick are made well, and even the dead come to life. I have come to take you to him."

"Poor Amrah!" said Tirzah, compassionately.

"No," cried Amrah, detecting the doubt underlying the expression—"no, as the Lord lives, even the Lord of Israel, my God as well as

yours, I speak the truth. Go with me, I pray, and lose no time. This morning he will pass by on his way to the city. See! the day is at hand. Take the food here—eat, and let us go.”

The mother listened eagerly. Not unlikely she had heard of the wonderful man, for by this time his fame had penetrated every nook in the land.

“Who is he?” she asked.

“A Nazarene.”

“Who told you about him?”

“Judah.”

“Judah told you? Is he at home?”

“He came last night.”

The widow, trying to still the beating of her heart, was silent a while.

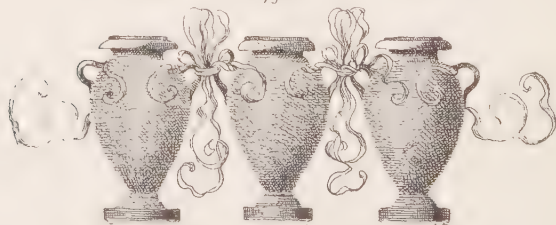
“Did Judah send you to tell us this?” she next asked.

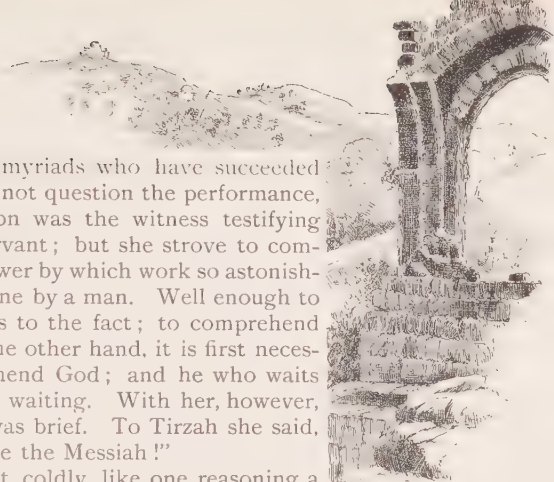
“No. He believes you dead.”

“There was a prophet once who cured a leper,” the mother said thoughtfully to Tirzah; “but he had his power from God.” Then addressing Amrah, she asked, “How does my son know this man so possessed?”

“He was travelling with him, and heard the lepers call, and saw them go away well. First there was one man; then there were ten; and they were all made whole.”

The elder listener was silent again. The skeleton hand shook. We may believe she was struggling to give the story the sanction of faith, which is always an absolutist in demand, and that it was with her as with the men of the day, eye-witnesses of what was done by the Christ,





as well as the myriads who have succeeded them. She did not question the performance, for her own son was the witness testifying through the servant; but she strove to comprehend the power by which work so astonishing could be done by a man. Well enough to make inquiry as to the fact; to comprehend the power, on the other hand, it is first necessary to comprehend God; and he who waits for that will die waiting. With her, however, the hesitation was brief. To Tirzah she said, "This must be the Messiah!"

She spoke not coldly, like one reasoning a doubt away, but as a woman of Israel familiar with the promises of God to her race—a woman of understanding, ready to be glad over the least sign of the realization of the promises.

"There was a time when Jerusalem and all Judea were filled with a story that he was born. I remember it. By this time he should be a man. It must be—it is he. Yes," she said to Amrah, "we will go with you. Bring the water which you will find in the tomb in a jar, and set the food for us. We will eat and be gone."

The breakfast, partaken under excitement, was soon despatched, and the three women set out on their extraordinary journey. As Tirzah had caught the confident spirit of the others, there was but one fear that troubled the party. Bethany, Amrah said, was the town the man was coming from; now from that to Jerusalem there were three roads, or rather paths—one over the first summit of Olivet, a second at its base, a third between the second

summit and the Mount of Offence. The three were not far apart; far enough, however, to make it possible for the unfortunates to miss the Nazarene if they failed the one he chose to come by.

A little questioning satisfied the mother that Amrah knew nothing of the country beyond the Cedron, and even less of the intentions of the man they were going to see, if they could. She discerned, also, that both Amrah and Tirzah—the one from confirmed habits of servitude, the other from natural dependency—looked to her for guidance; and she accepted the charge.

"We will go first to Bethphage," she said to them. "There, if the Lord favor us, we may learn what else to do."

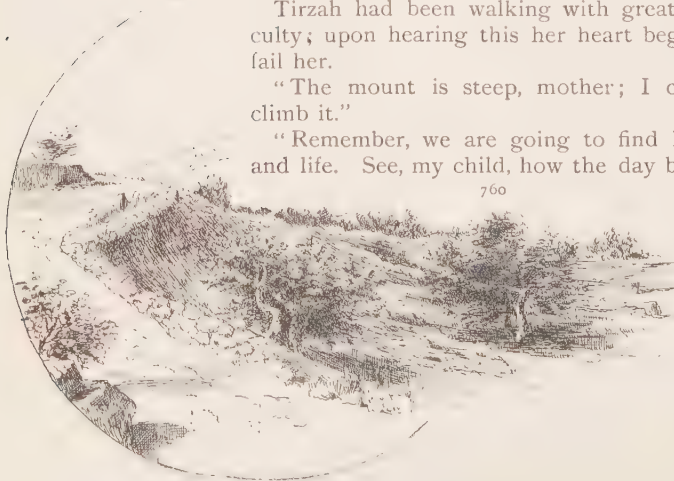
They descended the hill to Tophet and the King's Garden, and paused in the deep trail furrowed through them by centuries of way-faring.

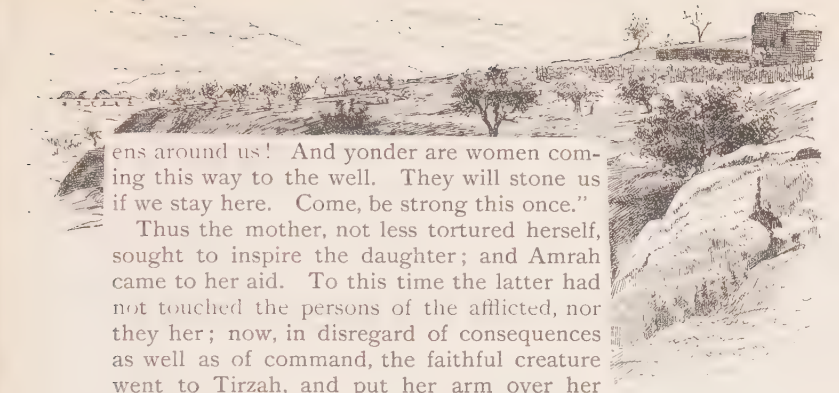
"I am afraid of the road," the matron said. "Better that we keep to the country among the rocks and trees. This is feast-day, and on the hill-sides yonder I see signs of a great multitude in attendance. By going across the Mount of Offence here we may avoid them."

Tirzah had been walking with great difficulty; upon hearing this her heart began to fail her.

"The mount is steep, mother; I cannot climb it."

"Remember, we are going to find health and life. See, my child, how the day bright-





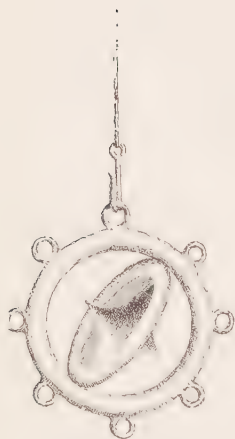
ens around us! And yonder are women coming this way to the well. They will stone us if we stay here. Come, be strong this once."

Thus the mother, not less tortured herself, sought to inspire the daughter; and Amrah came to her aid. To this time the latter had not touched the persons of the afflicted, nor they her; now, in disregard of consequences as well as of command, the faithful creature went to Tirzah, and put her arm over her shoulder, and whispered, "Lean on me. I am strong, though I am old; and it is but a little way off. There—now we can go."

The face of the hill they essayed to cross was somewhat broken with pits and ruins of old structures; but when at last they stood upon the top to rest, and looked at the spectacle presented them over in the north-west—at the Temple and its courtly terraces, at Zion, at the enduring towers white beetling into the sky beyond—the mother was strengthened with a love of life for life's sake.

"Look, Tirzah," she said—"look at the plates of gold on the Gate Beautiful. How they give back the flames of the sun, brightness for brightness! Do you remember we used to go up there? Will it not be pleasant to do so again? And think—home is but a little way off. I can almost see it over the roof of the Holy of Holies; and Judah will be there to receive us!"

From the side of the middle summit, garnished green with myrtle and olive trees, they saw, upon looking that way next, thin columns



of smoke rising lightly and straight up into the pulseless morning, each a warning of restless pilgrims astir, and of the flight of the pitiless hours, and the need of haste.

Though the good servant toiled faithfully to lighten the labor in descending the hill-side, not sparing herself in the least, the girl moaned at every step; sometimes in extremity of anguish she cried out. Upon reaching the road—that is, the road between the Mount of Offence and the middle or second summit of Olivet—she fell down exhausted.

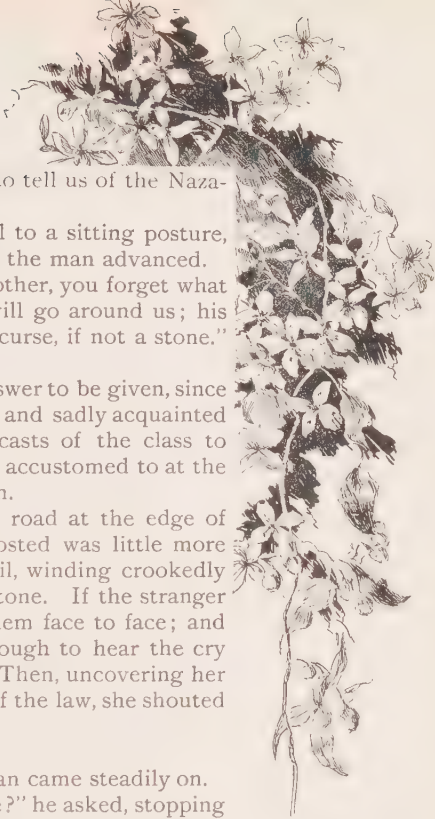
“Go on with Amrah, mother, and leave me here,” she said, faintly.

“No, no, Tirzah. What would the gain be to me if I were healed and you not? When Judah asks for you, as he will, what would I have to say to him were I to leave you?”

“Tell him I loved him.”

The elder leper arose from bending over the fainting sufferer, and gazed about her with that sensation of hope perishing which is more nearly like annihilation of the soul than anything else. The supremest joy of the thought of cure was inseparable from Tirzah, who was not too old to forget, in the happiness of healthful life to come, the years of misery by which she had been so reduced in body and broken in spirit. Even as the brave woman was about leaving the venture they were engaged in to the determination of God, she saw a man on foot coming rapidly up the road from the east.

“Courage, Tirzah! Be of cheer,” she said.



"Yonder I know is one to tell us of the Nazarene."

Amrah helped the girl to a sitting posture, and supported her while the man advanced.

"In your goodness, mother, you forget what we are. The stranger will go around us; his best gift to us will be a curse, if not a stone."

"We will see."

There was no other answer to be given, since the mother was too well and sadly acquainted with the treatment outcasts of the class to which she belonged were accustomed to at the hands of her countrymen.

As has been said, the road at the edge of which the group was posted was little more than a worn path or trail, winding crookedly through tumuli of limestone. If the stranger kept it, he must meet them face to face; and he did so, until near enough to hear the cry she was bound to give. Then, uncovering her head, a further demand of the law, she shouted shrilly,

"Unclean, unclean!"

To her surprise, the man came steadily on.

"What would you have?" he asked, stopping opposite them not four yards off.

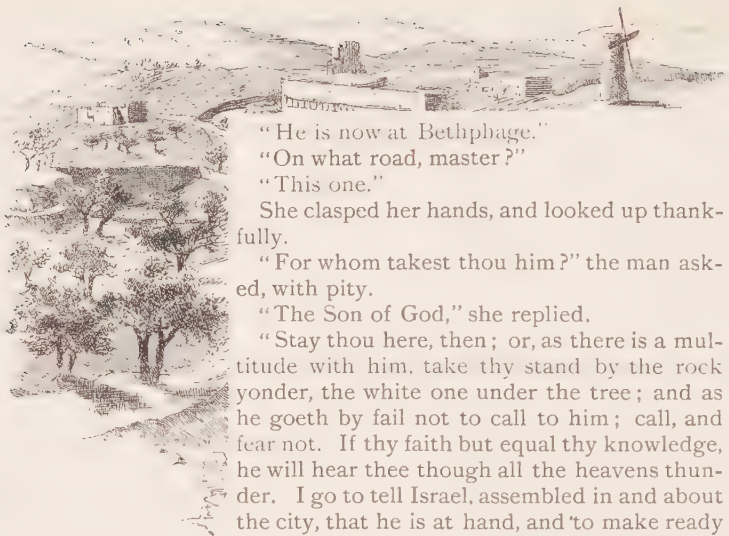
"Thou seest us. Have a care," the mother said, with dignity.

"Woman, I am the courier of him who speaketh but once to such as thou and they are healed. I am not afraid."

"The Nazarene?"

"The Messiah," he said.

"Is it true that he cometh to the city to-day?"



"He is now at Bethphage."

"On what road, master?"

"This one."

She clasped her hands, and looked up thankfully.

"For whom takest thou him?" the man asked, with pity.

"The Son of God," she replied.

"Stay thou here, then; or, as there is a multitude with him, take thy stand by the rock yonder, the white one under the tree; and as he goeth by fail not to call to him; call, and fear not. If thy faith but equal thy knowledge, he will hear thee though all the heavens thunder. I go to tell Israel, assembled in and about the city, that he is at hand, and to make ready to receive him. Peace to thee and thine, woman."

The stranger moved on.

"Did you hear, Tirzah? Did you hear? The Nazarene is on the road, on this one, and he will hear us. Once more, my child—oh, only once! and let us to the rock. It is but a step."

Thus encouraged, Tirzah took Amrah's hand and arose; but as they were going, Amrah said, "Stay; the man is returning." And they waited for him.

"I pray your grace, woman," he said, upon overtaking them. "Remembering that the sun will be hot before the Nazarene arrives, and that the city is near by to give me refreshment should I need it, I thought this water would do thee better than it will me. Take it and be of good cheer. Call to him as he passes."

He followed the words by offering her a gourd full of water, such as foot-travellers sometimes carried with them in their journeys across the hills; and instead of placing the gift on the ground for her to take up when he was at a safe distance, he gave it into her hand.

"Art thou a Jew?" she asked, surprised.

"I am that, and better; I am a disciple of the Christ who teacheth daily by word and example this thing which I have done unto you. The world hath long known the word charity without understanding it. Again I say peace and good cheer to thee and thine."

He went on, and they went slowly to the rock he had pointed out to them, high as their heads, and scarcely thirty yards from the road on the right. Standing in front of it, the mother satisfied herself they could be seen and heard plainly by passers-by whose notice they desired to attract. There they cast themselves under the tree in its shade, and drank of the gourd, and rested refreshed. Ere long Tirzah slept, and fearing to disturb her, the others held their peace.



CHAPTER IV
THE MIRACLE

DURING the third hour the road in front of the resting-place of the lepers became gradually more and more frequented by people going in the direction of Bethphage and Bethany; now, however, about the commencement of the fourth hour, a great crowd appeared over the crest of Olivet, and as it defiled down the road thousands in number, the two watchers noticed with wonder that every one in it carried a palm-branch freshly cut. As they sat absorbed by the novelty, the noise of another multitude approaching from the east drew their eyes that way. Then the mother awoke Tirzah.

"What is the meaning of it all?" the latter asked.

"He is coming," answered the mother. "These we see are from the city going to meet him; those we hear in the east are his friends bearing him company; and it will not be strange if the processions meet here before us."

"I fear, if they do, we cannot be heard."

The same thought was in the elder's mind.

"Amrah," she asked, "when Judah spoke of the healing of the ten, in what words did he say they called to the Nazarene?"

"Either they said, 'Lord, have mercy upon us,' or 'Master, have mercy. "

"Only that?"

"No more than I heard."

"Yet it was enough," the mother added, to herself.

"Yes," said Amrah, "Judah said he saw them go away well."

Meantime the people in the east came up slowly. When at length the foremost of them were in sight, the gaze of the lepers fixed upon a man riding in the midst of what seemed a chosen company which sang and danced about him in extravagance of joy. The rider was bareheaded and clad all in white. When he was in distance to be more clearly observed, these, looking anxiously, saw an olive-hued face shaded by long chestnut hair slightly sun-burned and parted in the middle. He looked neither to the right nor left. In the noisy abandon of his followers he appeared to have no part; nor did their favor disturb him in the least, or raise him out of the profound melancholy into which, as his countenance showed, he was plunged. The sun beat upon the back of his head, and lighting up the floating hair gave it a delicate likeness to a golden nimbus. Behind him the irregular procession, pouring forward with continuous singing and shouting, extended out of view. There was no need of any one to tell the lepers that this was he—the wonderful Nazarene!

"He is here, Tirzah," the mother said; "he is here. Come, my child."



As she spoke she glided in front of the white rock and fell upon her knees.

Directly the daughter and servant were by her side. Then at sight of the procession in the west, the thousands from the city halted, and began to wave their green branches, shouting, or rather chanting (for it was all in one voice),

“Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!”

And all the thousands who were of the rider's company, both those near and those afar, replied so the air shook with the sound, which was as a great wind threshing the side of the hill. Amidst the din, the cries of the poor lepers were not more than the twittering of dazed sparrows.

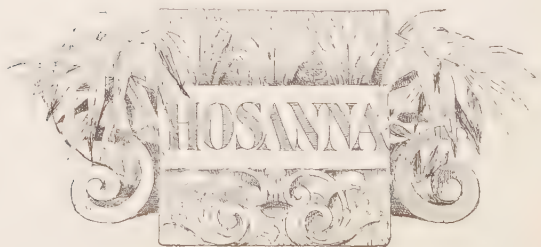
The moment of the meeting of the hosts was come, and with it the opportunity the sufferers were seeking; if not taken, it would be lost forever, and they would be lost as well.

“Nearer, my child—let us get nearer. He cannot hear us,” said the mother.

She arose, and staggered forward. Her ghastly hands were up, and she screamed with horrible shrillness. The people saw her—saw her hideous face, and stopped awe-struck—an effect for which extreme human misery, visible as in this instance, is as potent as majesty in purple and gold. Tirzah, behind her a little way, fell down too faint and frightened to follow farther.

“The lepers! the lepers!”

“Stone them!”



"The accursed of God ! Kill them !"

These, with other yells of like import, broke in upon the hosannas of the part of the multitude too far removed to see and understand the cause of the interruption. Some there were, however, near by familiar with the nature of the man to whom the unfortunates were appealing—some who, by long intercourse with him, had caught somewhat of his divine compassion: they gazed at him, and were silent while, in fair view, he rode up and stopped in front of the woman. She also beheld his face—calm, pitiful, and of exceeding beauty, the large eyes tender with benignant purpose.

And this was the colloquy that ensued :

"O Master, Master ! Thou seest our need ; thou canst make us clean. Have mercy upon us—mercy !"

"Believest thou I am able to do this?" he asked.

"Thou art he of whom the prophets spake—thou art the Messiah !" she replied.

His eyes grew radiant, his manner confident.

"Woman," he said, "great is thy faith ; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

He lingered an instant after, apparently unconscious of the presence of the throng—an instant—then he rode away.

To the heart divinely original, yet so human in all the better elements of humanity, going with sure prevision to a death of all the inventions of men the foulest and most cruel, breathing even then in the forecast shadow of





the awful event, and still as hungry and thirsty for love and faith as in the beginning, how precious and ineffably soothing the farewell exclamation of the grateful woman :

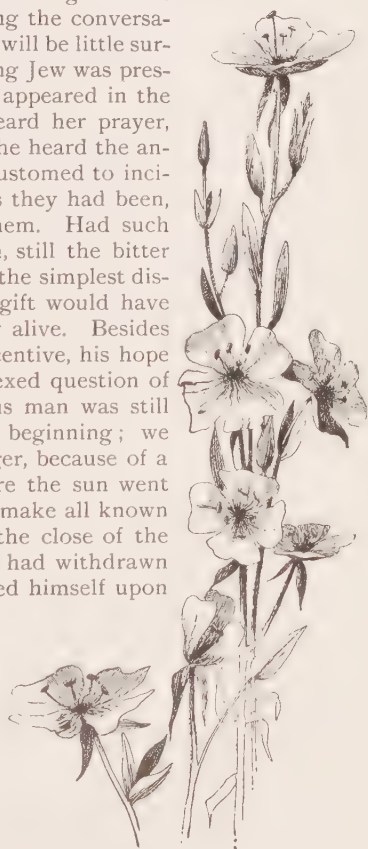
“To God in the highest, glory! Blessed, thrice blessed, the Son whom he hath given us!”

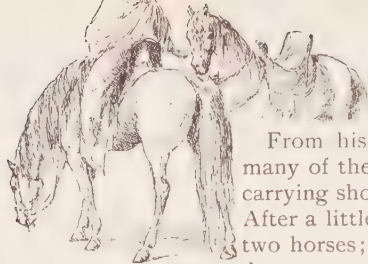
Immediately both the hosts, that from the city and that from Bethphage, closed around him with their joyous demonstrations, with hosannas and waving of palms, and so he passed from the lepers forever. Covering her head, the elder hastened to Tirzah, and folded her in her arms, crying, “Daughter, look up! I have his promise; he is indeed the Messiah. We are saved—saved!” And the two remained kneeling while the procession, slowly going, disappeared over the mount. When the noise of its singing afar was a sound scarcely heard the miracle began.

There was first in the hearts of the lepers a freshening of the blood; then it flowed faster and stronger, thrilling their wasted bodies with an infinitely sweet sense of painless healing. Each felt the scourge going from her; their strength revived; they were returning to be themselves. Directly, as if to make the purification complete, from body to spirit the quickening ran, exalting them to a very fervor of ecstasy. The power possessing them to this good end was most nearly that of a draught of swift and happy effect; yet it was unlike and superior in that its healing and cleansing were absolute, and not merely a delicious conscious-

ness while in progress, but the planting, growing, and maturing all at once of a recollection so singular and so holy that the simple thought of it should be of itself ever after a formless yet perfect thanksgiving.

To this transformation—for such it may be called quite as properly as a cure—there was a witness other than Amrah. The reader will remember the constancy with which Ben-Hur had followed the Nazarene throughout his wanderings; and now, recalling the conversation of the night before, there will be little surprise at learning that the young Jew was present when the leprous woman appeared in the path of the pilgrims. He heard her prayer, and saw her disfigured face; he heard the answer also, and was not so accustomed to incidents of the kind, frequent as they had been, as to have lost interest in them. Had such thing been possible with him, still the bitter disputation always excited by the simplest display of the Master's curative gift would have sufficed to keep his curiosity alive. Besides that, if not above it as an incentive, his hope to satisfy himself upon the vexed question of the mission of the mysterious man was still upon him strong as in the beginning; we might indeed say even stronger, because of a belief that now quickly, before the sun went down, the man himself would make all known by public proclamation. At the close of the scene, consequently, Ben-Hur had withdrawn from the procession, and seated himself upon a stone to wait its passage.





From his place he nodded recognition to many of the people—Galileans in his league, carrying short swords under their long abbas. After a little a swarthy Arab came up leading two horses; at a sign from Ben-Hur he also drew out.

“Stay here,” the young master said, when all were gone by, even the laggards. “I wish to be at the city early, and Aldebaran must do me service.”

He stroked the broad forehead of the horse, now in his prime of strength and beauty, then crossed the road towards the two women.

They were to him, it should be borne in mind, strangers in whom he felt interest only as they were subjects of a superhuman experiment, the result of which might possibly help him to solution of the mystery that had so long engaged him. As he proceeded, he glanced casually at the figure of the little woman over by the white rock, standing there her face hidden in her hands.

“As the Lord liveth, it is Amrah!” he said to himself.

He hurried on, and passing by the mother and daughter, still without recognizing them, he stopped before the servant.

“Amrah,” he said to her, “Amrah, what do you here?”

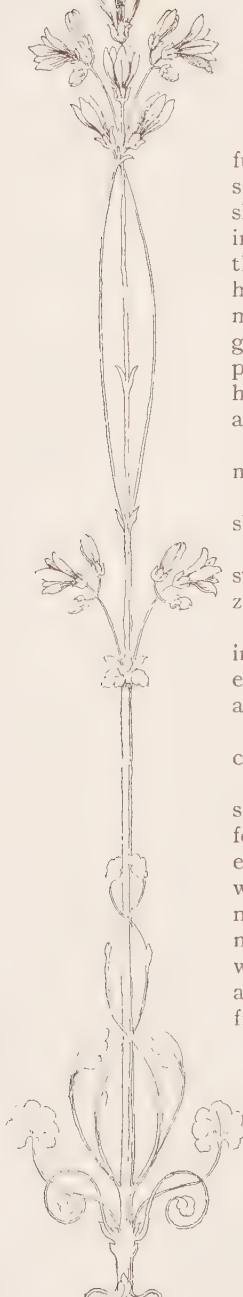
She rushed forward, and fell upon her knees before him, blinded by her tears, nigh speechless with contending joy and fear.

“O master, master! Thy God and mine, how good he is!”

The knowledge we gain from much sympathy with others passing through trials is but vaguely understood ; strangely enough, it enables us, among other things, to merge our identity into theirs often so completely that their sorrows and their delights become our own. So poor Amrah, aloof and hiding her face, knew the transformation the lepers were undergoing without a word spoken to her—knew it, and shared all their feeling to the full. Her countenance, her words, her whole manner, betrayed her condition ; and with swift presentiment he connected it with the women he had just passed : he felt her presence there at that time was in some way associated with them, and turned hastily as they arose to their feet. His heart stood still ; he became rooted in his tracks—dumb past outcry—awe-struck.

The woman he had seen before the Nazarene was standing with her hands clasped and eyes streaming, looking towards heaven. The mere transformation would have been a sufficient surprise ; but it was the least of the causes of his emotion. Could he be mistaken ? Never was there in life a stranger so like his mother ; and like her as she was the day the Roman snatched her from him. There was but one difference to mar the identity—the hair of this person was a little streaked with gray ; yet that was not impossible of reconciliation, since the intelligence which had directed the miracle might have taken into consideration the natural effects of the passage of years. And who was it by her side, if not Tirzah ?—fair, beauti-





ful, perfect, more mature, but in all other respects exactly the same in appearance as when she looked with him over the parapet the morning of the accident to Gratus. He had given them over as dead, and time had accustomed him to the bereavement; he had not ceased mourning for them, yet, as something distinguishable, they had simply dropped out of his plans and dreams. Scarcely believing his senses, he laid his hand upon the servant's head, and asked, tremulously,

"Amrah, Amrah—my mother! Tirzah! tell me if I see aright."

"Speak to them, O master, speak to them!" she said.

He waited no longer, but ran, with outstretched arms, crying, "Mother! mother! Tirzah! Here I am!"

They heard his call, and with a cry as loving started to meet him. Suddenly the mother stopped, drew back, and uttered the old alarm,

"Stay, Judah, my son; come not nearer. Unclean, unclean!"

The utterance was not from habit, grown since the dread disease struck her, as much as fear; and the fear was but another form of the ever-thoughtful maternal love. Though they were healed in person, the taint of the scourge might be in their garments ready for communication. He had no such thought. They were before him; he had called them, they had answered. Who or what should keep them from him now? Next moment the three, so

long separated, were mingling their tears in each other's arms.

The first ecstasy over, the mother said, "In this happiness, O my children, let us not be ungrateful. Let us begin life anew by acknowledgment of him to whom we are all so indebted."

They fell upon their knees, Amrah with the rest; and the prayer of the elder outspoken was as a psalm.

Tirzah repeated it word for word; so did Ben-Hur, but not with the same clear mind and questionless faith; for when they were risen, he asked,

"In Nazareth, where the man was born, mother, they call him the son of a carpenter. What is he?"

Her eyes rested upon him with all their old tenderness, and she answered as she had answered the Nazarene himself—

"He is the Messiah."

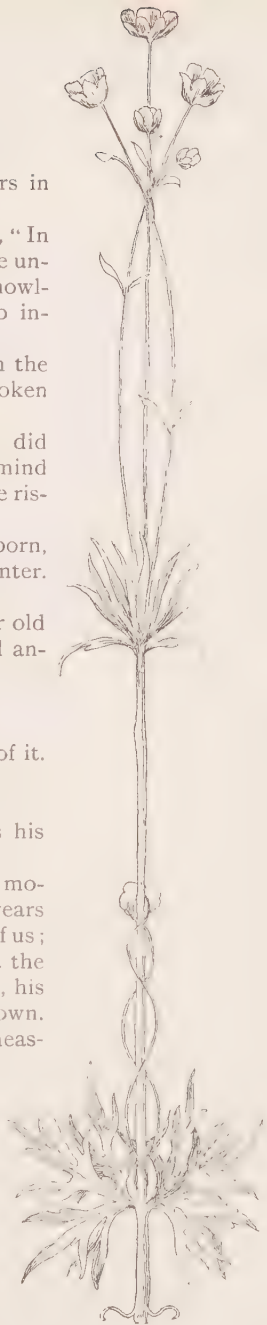
"And whence has he his power?"

"We may know by the use he makes of it. Can you tell me any ill he has done?"

"No."

"By that sign, then, I answer, He has his power from God."

It is not an easy thing to shake off in a moment the expectations nurtured through years until they have become essentially a part of us; and though Ben-Hur asked himself what the vanities of the world were to such a one, his ambition was obdurate and would not down. He persisted as men do yet every day in meas-



uring the Christ by himself. How much better if we measured ourselves by the Christ!

Naturally, the mother was the first to think of the cares of life.

"What shall we do now, my son? Where shall we go?"

Then Ben-Hur, recalled to duty, observed how completely every trace of the scourge had disappeared from his restored people; that each had back her perfection of person; that, as with Naaman when he came up out of the water, their flesh had come again like unto the flesh of a little child; and he took off his cloak, and threw it over Tirzah.

"Take it," he said, smiling; "the eye of the stranger would have shunned you before, now it shall not offend you."

The act exposed a sword belted to his side.

"Is it a time of war?" asked the mother, anxiously.

"No."

"Why, then, are you armed?"

"It may be necessary to defend the Nazarene."

Thus Ben-Hur evaded the whole truth.

"Has he enemies? Who are they?"

"Alas, mother, they are not all Romans!"

"Is he not of Israel, and a man of peace?"

"There was never one more so; but in the opinion of the rabbis and teachers he is guilty of a great crime."

"What crime?"

"In his eyes the uncircumcised Gentile is as



worthy favor as a Jew of the strictest habit. He preaches a new dispensation."

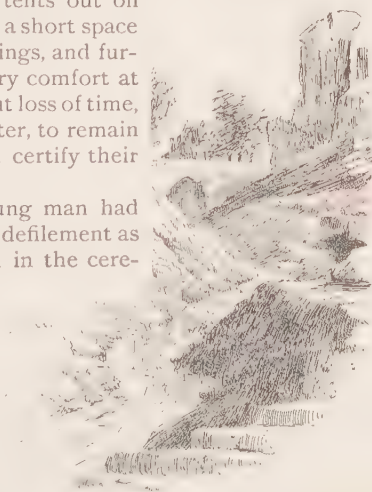
The mother was silent, and they moved to the shade of the tree by the rock. Calming his impatience to have them home again and hear their story, he showed them the necessity of obedience to the law governing in cases like theirs, and in conclusion called the Arab, bidding him take the horses to the gate by Bethesda and await him there; whereupon they set out by the way of the Mount of Offence. The return was very different from the coming; they walked rapidly and with ease, and in good time reached a tomb newly made near that of Absalom, overlooking the depths of Cedron. Finding it unoccupied, the women took possession, while he went on hastily to make the preparations necessary for their new condition.

CHAPTER V

PILGRIMS TO THE PASSOVER

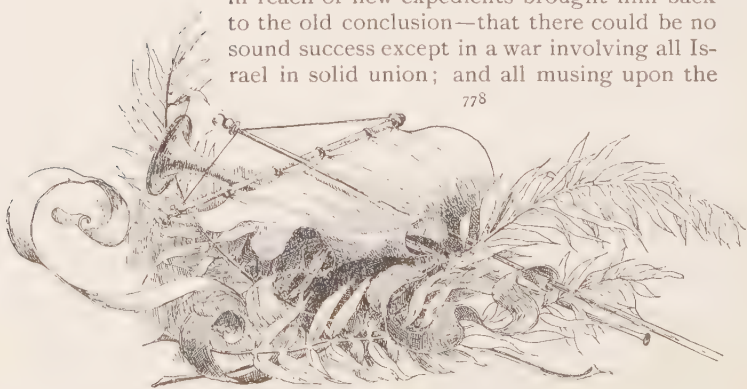
BEN-HUR pitched two tents out on the Upper Cedron east a short space of the Tombs of the Kings, and furnished them with every comfort at his command; and thither, without loss of time, he conducted his mother and sister, to remain until the examining priest could certify their perfect cleansing.

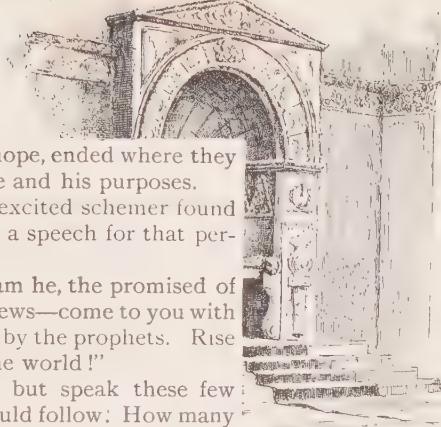
In course of the duty, the young man had subjected himself to such serious defilement as to debar him from participation in the cere-



monies of the great feast, then near at hand. He could not enter the least sacred of the courts of the Temple. Of necessity, not less than choice, therefore, he stayed at the tents with his beloved people. There was a great deal to hear from them, and a great deal to tell them of himself.

Stories such as theirs—sad experiences extending through a lapse of years, sufferings of body, acuter sufferings of mind—are usually long in the telling, the incidents seldom following each other in threaded connection. He listened to the narrative and all they told him, with outward patience masking inward feeling. In fact, his hatred of Rome and Romans reached a higher mark than ever; his desire for vengeance became a thirst which attempts at reflection only intensified. In the almost savage bitterness of his humor many mad impulses took hold of him. The opportunities of the highways presented themselves with singular force of temptation; he thought seriously of insurrection in Galilee; even the sea, ordinarily a retrospective horror to him, stretched itself map-like before his fancy, laced and interlaced with lines of passage crowded with imperial plunder and imperial travellers; but the better judgment matured in calmer hours was happily too firmly fixed to be supplanted by present passion however strong. Each mental venture in reach of new expedients brought him back to the old conclusion—that there could be no sound success except in a war involving all Israel in solid union; and all musing upon the





subject, all inquiry, all hope, ended where they began—in the Nazarene and his purposes.

At odd moments the excited schemer found a pleasure in fashioning a speech for that person :

“Hear, O Israel! I am he, the promised of God, born King of the Jews—come to you with the dominion spoken of by the prophets. Rise now, and lay hold on the world!”

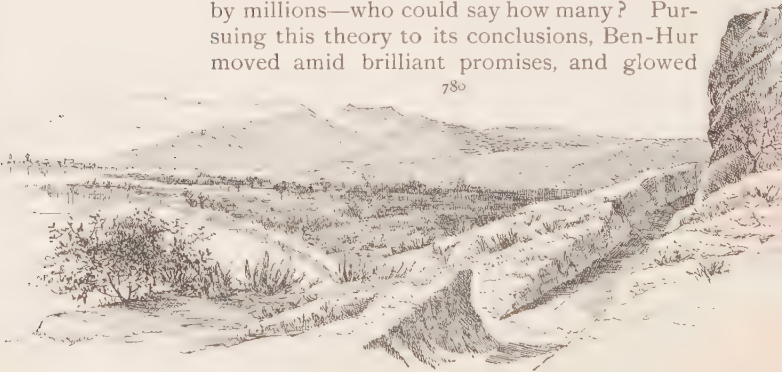
Would the Nazarene but speak these few words, what a tumult would follow! How many mouths performing the office of trumpets would take them up and blow them abroad for the massing of armies!

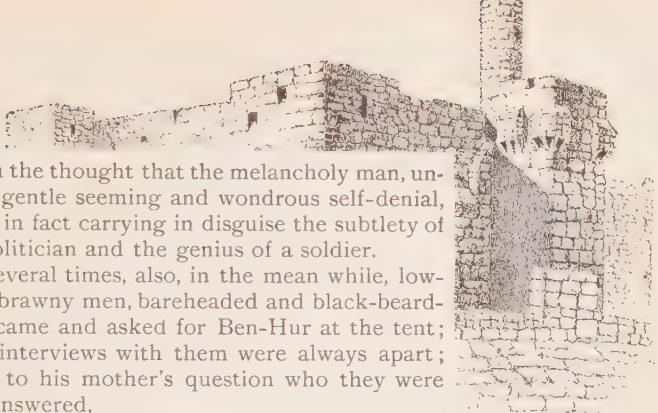
Would he speak them?

And eager to begin the work, and answering in the worldly way, Ben-Hur lost sight of the double nature of the man, and of the other possibility, that the divine in him might transcend the human. In the miracle of which Tirzah and his mother were the witnesses even more nearly than himself, he saw and set apart and dwelt upon a power ample enough to raise and support a Jewish crown over the wrecks of the Italian, and more than ample to remodel society, and convert mankind into one purified happy family; and when that work was done, could any one say the peace which might then be ordered without hinderance was not a mission worthy a son of God? Could any one then deny the Redeemership of the Christ? And discarding all consideration of political consequences, what unspeakable personal glory there would then be to him as a man! It was not

in the nature of any mere mortal to refuse such a career.

Meantime down the Cedron, and in towards Bezetha, especially on the road-sides quite up to the Damascus Gate, the country filled rapidly with all kinds of temporary shelters for pilgrims to the Passover. Ben-Hur visited the strangers, and talked with them; and returning to his tents, he was each time more and more astonished at the vastness of their numbers. And when he further discovered that every part of the world was represented among them—cities upon both shores of the Mediterranean far off as the Pillars of the West, river-towns in distant India, provinces in northernmost Europe, and that, though they frequently saluted him with tongues unacquainted with a syllable of the old Hebrew of the fathers, these representatives had all the same object—celebration of the notable feast—an idea tinged mistily with superstitious fancy forced itself upon him. Might he not after all have misunderstood the Nazarene? Might not that person by patient waiting be covering silent preparation, and proving his fitness for the glorious task before him? How much better this time for the movement than that other when, by Gennesaret, the Galileans would have forced assumption of the crown! Then the support would have been limited to a few thousands; now his proclamation would be responded to by millions—who could say how many? Pursuing this theory to its conclusions, Ben-Hur moved amid brilliant promises, and glowed





with the thought that the melancholy man, under gentle seeming and wondrous self-denial, was in fact carrying in disguise the subtlety of a politician and the genius of a soldier.

Several times, also, in the mean while, low-set, brawny men, bareheaded and black-bearded, came and asked for Ben-Hur at the tent; his interviews with them were always apart; and to his mother's question who they were he answered,

"Some good friends of mine from Galilee."

Through them he kept informed of the movements of the Nazarene, and of the schemes of the Nazarene's enemies, Rabbinical and Roman. That the good man's life was in danger, he knew; but that there were any bold enough to attempt to take it at that time he could not believe. It seemed too securely intrenched in a great fame and an assured popularity. The very vastness of the attendance in and about the city brought with it a seeming guarantee of safety. And yet, to say truth, Ben-Hur's confidence rested most certainly upon the miraculous power of the Christ. Pondering the subject in the purely human view, that the master of such authority over life and death, used so frequently for the good of others, would not exert it in care of himself was simply as much past belief as it was past understanding.

Nor should it be forgotten that all these were incidents of occurrence between the twenty-first day of March—counting by the modern calendar—and the twenty-fifth. The evening

of the latter day Ben-Hur yielded to his impatience, and rode to the city, leaving behind him a promise to return in the night.

The horse was fresh, and, choosing his own gait, sped swiftly. The eyes of the clambering vines winked at the rider from the garden fences on the way, there was nothing else to see him, nor child nor woman nor man. Through the rocky float in the hollows of the road the agate hoofs drummed, ringing like cups of steel; but without notice from any stranger. In the houses passed there were no tenants; the fires by the tent-doors were out; the road was deserted; for this was the first Passover eve, and the hour "between the evenings" when the visiting millions crowded the city, and the slaughter of lambs in offering reeked the forecourts of the Temple, and the priests in ordered lines caught the flowing blood and carried it swiftly to the dripping altars—when all was haste and hurry, racing with the stars fast coming with the signal after which the roasting and the eating and the singing might go on, but not the preparation more.

Through the great northern gate the rider rode, and lo! Jerusalem before the fall, in ripeness of glory, illuminated for the Lord.





CHAPTER VI

A SERPENT OF THE NILE

BEN-HUR alighted at the gate of the khan from which the three Wise Men more than thirty years before departed, going down to Bethlehem.

There, in keeping of his Arab followers, he left the horse, and shortly after was at the wicket of his father's house, and in a yet briefer space in the great chamber. He called for Malluch first; that worthy being out, he sent a salutation to his friends the merchant and the Egyptian. They were being carried abroad to see the celebration. The latter, he was informed, was very feeble, and in a state of deep dejection.

Young people of that time who were supposed hardly to know their own hearts indulged the habit of politic indirection quite as much as young people in the same condition indulge it in this time; so when Ben-Hur inquired for the good Balthasar, and with grave courtesy desired to know if he would be pleased to see him, he really addressed the daughter a notice of his arrival. While the servant was answering for the elder, the curtain of the doorway was drawn aside, and the younger Egyptian came in, and walked—or floated, upborne in a white cloud of the gauzy raiment she so loved and lived in—to the centre of the cham-

ber, where the light cast by lamps from the seven-armed brazen stick planted upon the floor was the strongest. With her there was no fear of light.

The servant left the two alone.

In the excitement occasioned by the events of the few days past Ben-Hur had scarcely given a thought to the fair Egyptian. If she came to his mind at all, it was merely as a briefest pleasure, a suggestion of a delight which could wait for him, and was waiting.

But now the influence of the woman revived with all its force the instant Ben-Hur beheld her. He advanced to her eagerly, but stopped and gazed. Such a change he had never seen!

Theretoforeshe had been a lover studious to win him—in manner all warmth, each glance an admission, each action an avowal. She had showered him with incense of flattery. While he was present, she had impressed him with her admiration; going away, he carried the impression with him to remain a delicious expectancy hastening his return. It was for him the painted eyelids drooped lowest over the lustrous almond eyes; for him the love-stories caught from the professionals abounding in the streets of Alexandria were repeated with emphasis and lavishment of poetry; for him endless exclamations of sympathy, and smiles, and little privileges with hand and hair and cheek and lips, and songs of the Nile, and displays of jewelry, and subtleties of lace in veils and scarfs, and other subtleties not less exquisite in flosses of Indian silk. The idea, old as the



oldest of peoples, that beauty is the reward of the hero had never such realism as she contrived for his pleasure; insomuch that he could not doubt he was her hero; she avouched it in a thousand artful ways as natural with her as her beauty—winsome ways reserved, it would seem, by the passionate genius of old Egypt for its daughters.

Such the Egyptian had been to Ben-Hur from the night of the boat-ride on the lake in the Orchard of Palms. But now!

Elsewhere in this volume the reader may have observed a term of somewhat indefinite meaning used reverently in a sacred connection; we repeat it now with a general application. There are few persons who have not a double nature, the real and the acquired; the latter a kind of addendum resulting from education, which in time often perfects it into a part of the being as unquestionable as the first. Leaving the thought to the thoughtful, we proceed to say that now the real nature of the Egyptian made itself manifest.

It was not possible for her to have received a stranger with repulsion more incisive: yet she was apparently as passionless as a statue, only the small head was a little tilted, the nostrils a little drawn, and the sensuous lower lip pushed the upper the least bit out of its natural curvature.

She was the first to speak.

"Your coming is timely, O son of Hur," she said, in a voice sharply distinct. "I wish to thank you for hospitality; after to-mor-



row I may not have the opportunity to do so."

Ben-Hur bowed slightly without taking his eyes from her.

"I have heard of a custom which the dice-players observe with good result among themselves," she continued. "When the game is over, they refer to their tablets and cast up their accounts; then they libate the gods and put a crown upon the happy winner. We have had a game—it has lasted through many days and nights. Why, now that it is at an end, shall not we see to which the chaplet belongs?"

Yet very watchful, Ben-Hur answered, lightly, "A man may not balk a woman bent on having her way."

"Tell me," she continued, inclining her head, and permitting the sneer to become positive—"tell me, O prince of Jerusalem, where is he, that son of the carpenter of Nazareth, and son not less of God, from whom so lately such mighty things were expected?"

He waved his hand impatiently, and replied, "I am not his keeper."

The beautiful head sank forward yet lower.

"Has he broken Rome to pieces?"

Again, but with anger, Ben-Hur raised his hand in deprecation.

"Where has he seated his capital?" she proceeded. "Cannot I go see his throne and its lions of bronze? And his palace—he raised the dead; and to such a one, what is it to raise a golden house? He has but to stamp his foot





and say the word, and the house is, pillared like Karnak, and wanting nothing."

There was by this time slight ground left to believe her playing; the questions were offensive, and her manner pointed with unfriendliness; seeing which, he on his side became more wary, and said, with good-humor, "O Egypt, let us wait another day, even another week, for him, the lions, and the palace."

She went on without noticing the suggestion.

"And how is it I see you in that garb? Such is not the habit of governors in India or vice-kings elsewhere. I saw the satrap of Teheran once, and he wore a turban of silk and a cloak of cloth of gold, and the hilt and scabbard of his sword made me dizzy with their splendor of precious stones. I thought Osiris had lent him a glory from the sun. I fear you have not entered upon your kingdom—the kingdom I was to share with you."

"The daughter of my wise guest is kinder than she imagines herself; she is teaching me that Isis may kiss a heart without making it better."

Ben-Hur spoke with cold courtesy, and Iras, after playing with the pendent solitaire of her necklace of coins, rejoined, "For a Jew, the son of Hur is clever. I saw your dreaming Cæsar make his entry into Jerusalem. You told us he would that day proclaim himself King of the Jews from the steps of the Temple. I beheld the procession descend the mountain bringing him. I heard their singing. They were beautiful with palms in motion. I looked everywhere



among them for a figure with a promise of royalty—a horseman in purple, a chariot with a driver in shining brass, a stately warrior behind an orbed shield, rivalling his spear in stature. I looked for his guard. It would have been pleasant to have seen a prince of Jerusalem and a cohort of the legions of Galilee."

She flung her listener a glance of provoking disdain, then laughed heartily, as if the ludicrousness of the picture in her mind were too strong for contempt.

"Instead of a Sesostris returning in triumph or a Cæsar helmed and sworded—ha, ha, ha!—I saw a man with a woman's face and hair, riding an ass's colt, and in tears. The King! the Son of God! the Redeemer of the World! Ha, ha, ha!"

In spite of himself, Ben-Hur winced.

"I did not quit my place, O prince of Jerusalem," she said, before he could recover. "I did not laugh. I said to myself, 'Wait. In the Temple he will glorify himself as becomes a hero about to take possession of the world.' I saw him enter the Gate of Shushan and the Court of the Women. I saw him stop and stand before the Gate Beautiful. There were people with me on the porch and in the courts, and on the cloisters and on the steps of the three sides of the Temple there were other people—I will say a million of people, all waiting breathlessly to hear his proclamation. The pillars were not more still than we. Ha, ha, ha! I fancied I heard the axles of the mighty Roman machine begin to crack. Ha, ha, ha! O prince,



by the soul of Solomon, your King of the World drew his gown about him and walked away, and out by the farthest gate, nor opened his mouth to say a word; and—the Roman machine is running yet!"

In simple homage to a hope that instant lost—a hope which, as it began to fall and while it was falling, he unconsciously followed with a parting look down to its disappearance—Ben-Hur lowered his eyes.

At no previous time, whether when Balthasar was plying him with arguments, or when miracles were being done before his face, had the disputed nature of the Nazarene been so plainly set before him. The best way, after all, to reach an understanding of the divine is by study of the human. In the things superior to men we may always look to find God. So with the picture given by the Egyptian of the scene when the Nazarene turned from the Gate Beautiful; its central theme was an act utterly beyond performance by a man under control of merely human inspirations. A parable to a parable-loving people, it taught what the Christ had so often asserted—that his mission was not political. There was not much more time for thought of all this than that allowed for a common respiration; yet the idea took fast hold of Ben-Hur, and in the same instant he followed his hope of vengeance out of sight, and the man with the woman's face and hair, and in tears, came near to him—near enough to leave something of his spirit behind.

"Daughter of Balthasar," he said, with dig-



nity, "if this be the game of which you spoke to me, take the chaplet—I accord it yours. Only let us make an end of words. That you have a purpose I am sure. To it, I pray, and I will answer you; then let us go our several ways, and forget we ever met. Say on; I will listen, but not to more of that which you have given me."

She regarded him intently a moment, as if determining what to do—possibly she might have been measuring his will—then she said, coldly, "You have my leave—go."

"Peace to you," he responded, and walked away.

As he was about passing out of the door she called to him.

"A word."

He stopped where he was and looked back.

"Consider all I know about you."

"O most fair Egyptian," he said, returning, "what all do you know about me?"

She looked at him absently.

"You are more of a Roman, son of Hur, than any of your Hebrew brethren."

"Am I so unlike my countrymen?" he asked, indifferently.

"The demi-gods are all Roman now," she rejoined.

"And therefore you will tell me what more you know about me?"

"The likeness is not lost upon me. It might induce me to save you."

"Save me!"

The pink-stained fingers toyed daintily with



GATE OF ST. STEPHEN

the lustrous pendant at the throat, and her voice was exceeding low and soft; only a tapping on the floor with her silken sandal admonished him to have a care.

"There was a Jew, an escaped galley-slave, who killed a man in the Palace of Idernee," she began, slowly.

Ben-Hur was startled.

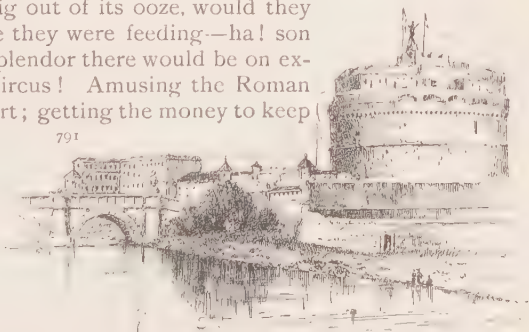
"The same Jew slew a Roman soldier before the Market-place here in Jerusalem; the same Jew has three trained legions from Galilee to seize the Roman governor to-night; the same Jew has alliances perfected for war upon Rome, and Ilderim the Sheik is one of his partners."

Drawing nearer to him, she almost whispered,

"You have lived in Rome. Suppose these things repeated in ears we know of. Ah! you change color."

He drew back from her with somewhat of the look which may be imagined upon the face of a man who, thinking to play with a kitten, has run upon a tiger; and she proceeded:

"You are acquainted in the antechamber, and know the Lord Sejanus. Suppose it were told him with the proofs in hand—or without the proofs—that the same Jew is the richest man in the East—nay, in all the empire. The fishes of the Tiber would have fattening other than that they dig out of its ooze, would they not? And while they were feeding—ha! son of Hur!—what splendor there would be on exhibition in the Circus! Amusing the Roman people is a fine art; getting the money to keep



them amused is another art even finer; and was there ever an artist the equal of the Lord Sejanus?"

Ben-Hur was not too much stirred by the evident baseness of the woman for recollection. Not unfrequently when all the other faculties are numb and failing memory does its offices with the greatest fidelity. The scene at the spring on the way to the Jordan reproduced itself; and he remembered thinking then that Esther had betrayed him, and thinking so now, he said calmly as he could,

"To give you pleasure, daughter of Egypt, I acknowledge your cunning, and that I am at your mercy. It may also please you to hear me acknowledge I have no hope of your favor. I could kill you, but you are a woman. The Desert is open to receive me; and though Rome is a good hunter of men, there she would follow long and far before she caught me, for in its heart there are wildernesses of spears as well as wildernesses of sand, and it is not unlovely to the unconquered Parthian. In the toils as I am—dupe that I have been—yet there is one thing my due: who told you all you know about me? In flight or captivity, dying even, there will be consolation in leaving the traitor the curse of a man who has lived knowing nothing but wretchedness. Who told you all you know about me?"

It might have been a touch of art, or might have been sincere—that as it may—the expression of the Egyptian's face became sympathetic.





"There are in my country, O son of Hur," she said, presently, "workmen who make pictures by gathering vari-colored shells here and there on the sea-shore after storms, and cutting them up, and patching the pieces as inlaying on marble slabs. Can you not see the hint there is in the practice to such as go searching for secrets? Enough that from this person I gathered a handful of little circumstances, and from that other yet another handful, and that afterwhile I put them together, and was happy as a woman can be who has at disposal the fortune and life of a man whom"—she stopped, and beat the floor with her foot, and looked away as if to hide a sudden emotion from him; with an air of even painful resolution she presently finished the sentence—"whom she is at loss what to do with."

"No, it is not enough," Ben-Hur said, unmoved by the play—"it is not enough. Tomorrow you will determine what to do with me. I may die."

"True," she rejoined quickly and with emphasis, "I had something from Sheik Ilderim as he lay with my father in a grove out in the Desert. The night was still, very still, and the walls of the tent, sooth to say, were poor ward against ears outside listening to—birds and beetles flying through the air."

She smiled at the conceit, but proceeded:

"Some other things—bits of shell for the picture—I had from—"

"Whom?"

"The son of Hur himself."

"Was there no other who contributed?"

"No, not one."

Hur drew a breath of relief, and said, lightly, "Thanks. It were not well to keep the Lord Sejanus waiting for you. The Desert is not so sensitive. Again, O Egypt, peace!"

To this time he had been standing uncovered; now he took the handkerchief from his arm where it had been hanging, and adjusting it upon his head, turned to depart. But she arrested him; in her eagerness, she even reached a hand to him.

"Stay," she said.

He looked back at her, but without taking the hand, though it was very noticeable for its sparkling of jewels; and he knew by her manner that the reserved point of the scene which was so surprising to him was now to come.

"Stay, and do not distrust me, O son of Hur, if I declare I know why the noble Arrius took you for his heir. And, by Isis! by all the gods of Egypt! I swear I tremble to think of you, so brave and generous, under the hand of the remorseless minister. You have left a portion of your youth in the atria of the great capital; consider, as I do, what the Desert will be to you in contrast of life. Oh, I give you pity—pity! And if you but do what I say, I will save you. That, also, I swear, by our holy Isis!"

Words of entreaty and prayer these, poured forth volubly and with earnestness and the mighty sanction of beauty.

"Almost—almost I believe you," Ben-Hur said, yet hesitatingly, and in a voice low and



indistinct; for a doubt remained with him grumbling against the yielding tendency of the man—a good sturdy doubt, such a one as has saved many a life and fortune.

“The perfect life for a woman is to live in love; the greatest happiness for a man is the conquest of himself; and that, O prince, is what I have to ask of you.”

She spoke rapidly, and with animation; indeed, she had never appeared to him so fascinating.

“You had once a friend,” she continued. “It was in your boyhood. There was a quarrel, and you and he became enemies. He did you wrong. After many years you met him again in the Circus at Antioch.”

“Messala!”

“Yes, Messala. You are his creditor. Forgive the past; admit him to friendship again; restore the fortune he lost in the great wager; rescue him. The six talents are as nothing to you; not so much as a bud lost upon a tree already in full leaf; but to him— Ah, he must go about with a broken body; wherever you meet him he must look up to you from the ground. O Ben-Hur, noble prince! To a Roman descended as he is, beggary is the other most odious name for death. Save him from beggary!”

If the rapidity with which she spoke was a cunning invention to keep him from thinking, either she never knew or else had forgotten that there are convictions which derive nothing from thought, but drop into place without



leave or notice. It seemed to him, when at last she paused to have his answer, that he could see Messala himself peering at him over her shoulder; and in its expression the countenance of the Roman was not that of a mendicant or a friend; the sneer was as patrician as ever, and the fine edge of the hauteur as flawless and irritating.

"The appeal has been decided then, and for once a Messala takes nothing. I must go and write it in my book of great occurrences—a judgment by a Roman against a Roman! But did he—did Messala send you to me with this request, O Egypt?"

"He has a noble nature, and judged you by it."

Ben-Hur took the hand upon his arm.

"As you know him in such friendly way, fair Egyptian, tell me, would he do for me, there being a reversal of the conditions, that he asks of me? Answer, by Isis! Answer, for the truth's sake!"

There was insistence in the touch of his hand, and in his look also.

"Oh!" she began, "he is—"

"A Roman, you were about to say; meaning that I, a Jew, must not determine dues from me to him by any measure of dues from him to me; being a Jew, I must forgive him my winnings because he is a Roman. If you have more to tell me, daughter of Balthasar, speak quickly, quickly; for by the Lord God of Israel, when this heat of blood, hotter waxing, attains its highest, I may not be able longer to see



that you are a woman, and beautiful! I may see but the spy of a master the more hateful because the master is a Roman. Say on, and quickly."

She threw his hand off and stepped back into the full light, with all the evil of her nature collected in her eyes and voice.

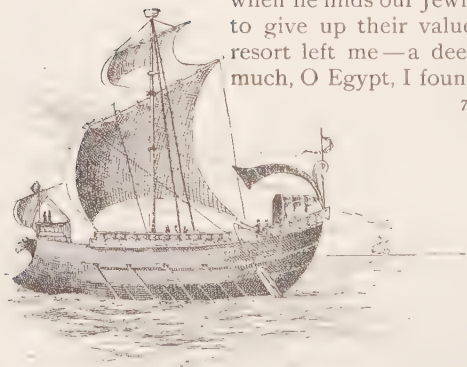
"Thou drinker of lees, feeder upon husks! To think I could love thee, having seen Messala! Such as thou were born to serve him. He would have been satisfied with release of the six talents; but I say to the six thou shalt add twenty—twenty, dost thou hear? The kissings of my little finger which thou hast taken from him, though with my consent, shall be paid for; and that I have followed thee with affectation of sympathy, and endured thee so long, enter into the account not less because I was serving him. The merchant here is thy keeper of moneys. If by to-morrow at noon he has not thy order acted upon in favor of my Messala for six-and-twenty talents—mark the sum!—thou shalt settle with the Lord Sejanus. Be wise and—farewell."

As she was going to the door, he put himself in her way.

"The old Egypt lives in you," he said. "Whether you see Messala to-morrow or the next day, here or in Rome, give him this message. Tell him I have back the money, even the six talents, he robbed me of by robbing my father's estate; tell him I survived the galleys to which he had me sent, and in my strength rejoice in his beggary and dishonor; tell him I



think the affliction of body which he has from my hand is the curse of our Lord God of Israel upon him more fit than death for his crimes against the helpless; tell him my mother and sister, whom he had sent to a cell in Antonia that they might die of leprosy, are alive and well, thanks to the power of the Nazarene whom you so despise; tell him that, to fill my measure of happiness, they are restored to me, and that I will go hence to their love, and find in it more than compensation for the impure passions which you leave me to take to him; tell him—this for your comfort, O cunning incarnate, as much as his—tell him that when the Lord Sejanus comes to despoil me he will find nothing; for the inheritancce I had from the duumvir, including the villa by Misenum, has been sold, and the money from the sale is out of reach, afloat in the marts of the world as bills of exchange; and that this house and the goods and merchandise and the ships and caravans with which Simonides plies his commerce with such princely profits are covered by imperial safeguards—a wise head having found the price of the favor, and the Lord Sejanus preferring a reasonable gain in the way of gift to much gain fished from pools of blood and wrong; tell him if all this were not so, if the money and property were all mine, yet should he not have the least part of it, for when he finds our Jewish bills, and forces them to give up their values, there is yet another resort left me—a deed of gift to Cæsar—so much, O Egypt, I found out in the atria of the



great capital ; tell him that along with my defiance I do not send him a curse in words, but, as a better expression of my undying hate, I send him one who will prove to him the sum of all curses ; and when he looks at you repeating this my message, daughter of Balthasar, his Roman shrewdness will tell him all I mean. Go now—and I will go."

He conducted her to the door, and, with ceremonious politeness, held back the curtain while she passed out.

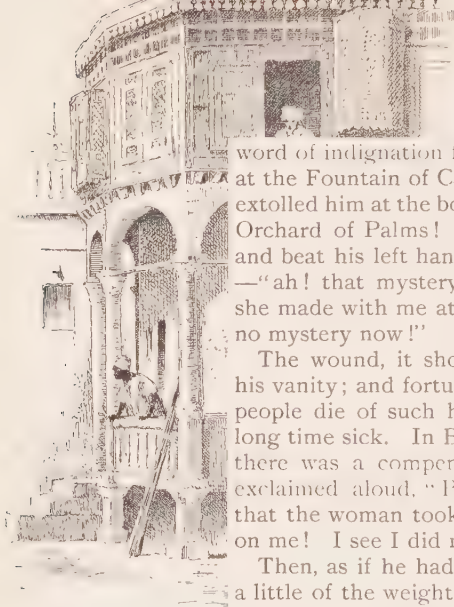
"Peace to you," he said, as she disappeared.

CHAPTER VII

BEN-HUR RETURNS TO ESTHER

WHEN Ben-Hur left the guest-chamber there was not nearly so much life in his action as when he entered it ; his steps were slower, and he went along with his head quite upon his breast. Having made discovery that a man with a broken back may yet have a sound brain, he was reflecting upon the discovery.

Forasmuch as it is easy after a calamity has befallen to look back and see the proofs of its coming strewn along the way, the thought that he had not even suspected the Egyptian as in Messala's interest, but had gone blindly on through whole years putting himself and his friends more and more at her mercy, was a sore wound to the young man's vanity. "I remember," he said to himself, "she had no



word of indignation for the perfidious Roman at the Fountain of Castalia! I remember she extolled him at the boat-ride on the lake in the Orchard of Palms! And, ah!"—he stopped, and beat his left hand violently with his right—"ah! that mystery about the appointment she made with me at the Palace of Idernee is no mystery now!"

The wound, it should be observed, was to his vanity; and fortunately it is not often that people die of such hurts, or even continue a long time sick. In Ben-Hur's case, moreover, there was a compensation; for presently he exclaimed aloud, "Praised be the Lord God that the woman took not a more lasting hold on me! I see I did not love her."

Then, as if he had already parted with not a little of the weight on his mind, he stepped forward more lightly; and, coming to the place on the terrace where one stair-way led down to the court-yard below, and another ascended to the roof, he took the latter and began to climb. As he made the last step in the flight he stopped again.

"Can Balthasar have been her partner in the long mask she has been playing? No, no. Hypocrisy seldom goes with wrinkled age like that. Balthasar is a good man."

With this decided opinion he stepped upon the roof. There was a full moon overhead, yet the vault of the sky at the moment was lurid with light cast up from the fires burning in the streets and open places of the city, and the chanting and chorusing of the old psalmody of

Israel filled it with plaintive harmonies to which he could not but listen. The countless voices bearing the burden seemed to say, "Thus, O son of Judah, we prove our worshipfulness of the Lord God, and our loyalty to the land he gave us. Let a Gideon appear, or a David, or a Maccabæus, and we are ready."

That seemed an introduction; for next he saw the man of Nazareth.

In certain moods the mind is disposed to mock itself with inapposite fancies.

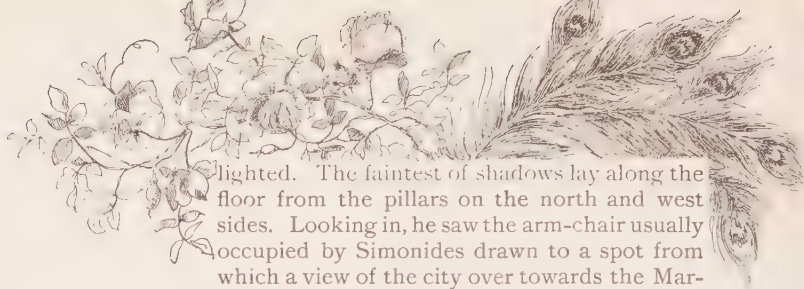
The tearful woman-like face of the Christ stayed with him while he crossed the roof to the parapet above the street on the north side of the house, and there was in it no sign of war; but rather as the heavens of calm evenings look peace upon everything, so it looked, provoking the old question, What manner of man is he?

Ben-Hur permitted himself one glance over the parapet, then turned and walked mechanically towards the summer-house.

"Let them do their worst," he said, as he went slowly on. "I will not forgive the Roman. I will not divide my fortune with him, nor will I fly from this city of my fathers. I will call on Galilee first, and here make the fight. By brave deeds I will bring the tribes to our side. He who raised up Moses will find us a leader, if I fail. If not the Nazarene, then some other of the many ready to die for freedom."

The interior of the summer-house, when Ben-Hur, slow sauntering, came to it, was murkily





lighted. The faintest of shadows lay along the floor from the pillars on the north and west sides. Looking in, he saw the arm-chair usually occupied by Simonides drawn to a spot from which a view of the city over towards the Market-place could be best had.

"The good man is returned. I will speak with him, unless he be asleep."

He walked in, and with a quiet step approached the chair. Peering over the high back, he beheld Esther nestled in the seat asleep—a small figure snuggled away under her father's lap-robe. The hair dishevelled fell over her face. Her breathing was low and irregular. Once it was broken by a long sigh, ending in a sob. Something—it might have been the sigh or the loneliness in which he found her—imparted to him the idea that the sleep was a rest from sorrow rather than fatigue. Nature kindly sends such relief to children, and he was used to thinking Esther scarcely more than a child. He put his arms upon the back of the chair, and thought.

"I will not wake her. I have nothing to tell her—nothing unless—unless it be my love. . . . She is a daughter of Judah, and beautiful, and so unlike the Egyptian; for there it is all vanity, here all truth; there ambition, here duty; there selfishness, here self-sacrifice. . . . Nay, the question is not do I love her, but does she love me? She was my friend from the beginning. The night on the terrace at Antioch, how child-like she begged me not to make Rome my enemy, and had me tell her of the villa by Mise-

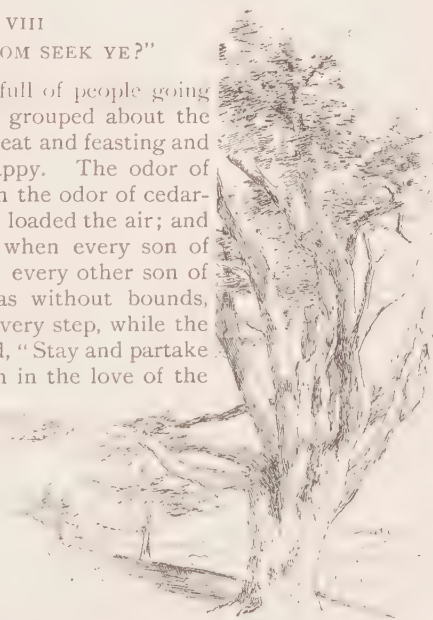
num, and of the life there! That she should not see I saw her cunning drift I kissed her. Can she have forgotten the kiss? I have not. I love her. . . . They do not know in the city that I have back my people. I shrank from telling it to the Egyptian; but this little one will rejoice with me over their restoration, and welcome them with love and sweet services of hand and heart. She will be to my mother another daughter; in Tirzah she will find her other self. I would wake her and tell her these things, but—out on the sorceress of Egypt! Of that folly I could not command myself to speak. I will go away, and wait another and a better time. I will wait. Fair Esther, dutiful child, daughter of Judah!"

He retired silently as he came.

CHAPTER VIII

GETHSEMANE—"WHOM SEEK YE?"

THE streets were full of people going and coming, or grouped about the fires roasting meat and feasting and singing and happy. The odor of scorching flesh mixed with the odor of cedar-wood aflame and smoking loaded the air; and as this was the occasion when every son of Israel was full brother to every other son of Israel, and hospitality was without bounds, Ben-Hur was saluted at every step, while the groups by the fires insisted, "Stay and partake with us. We are brethren in the love of the





Lord." But with thanks to them he hurried on, intending to take horse at the khan and return to the tents on the Cedron.

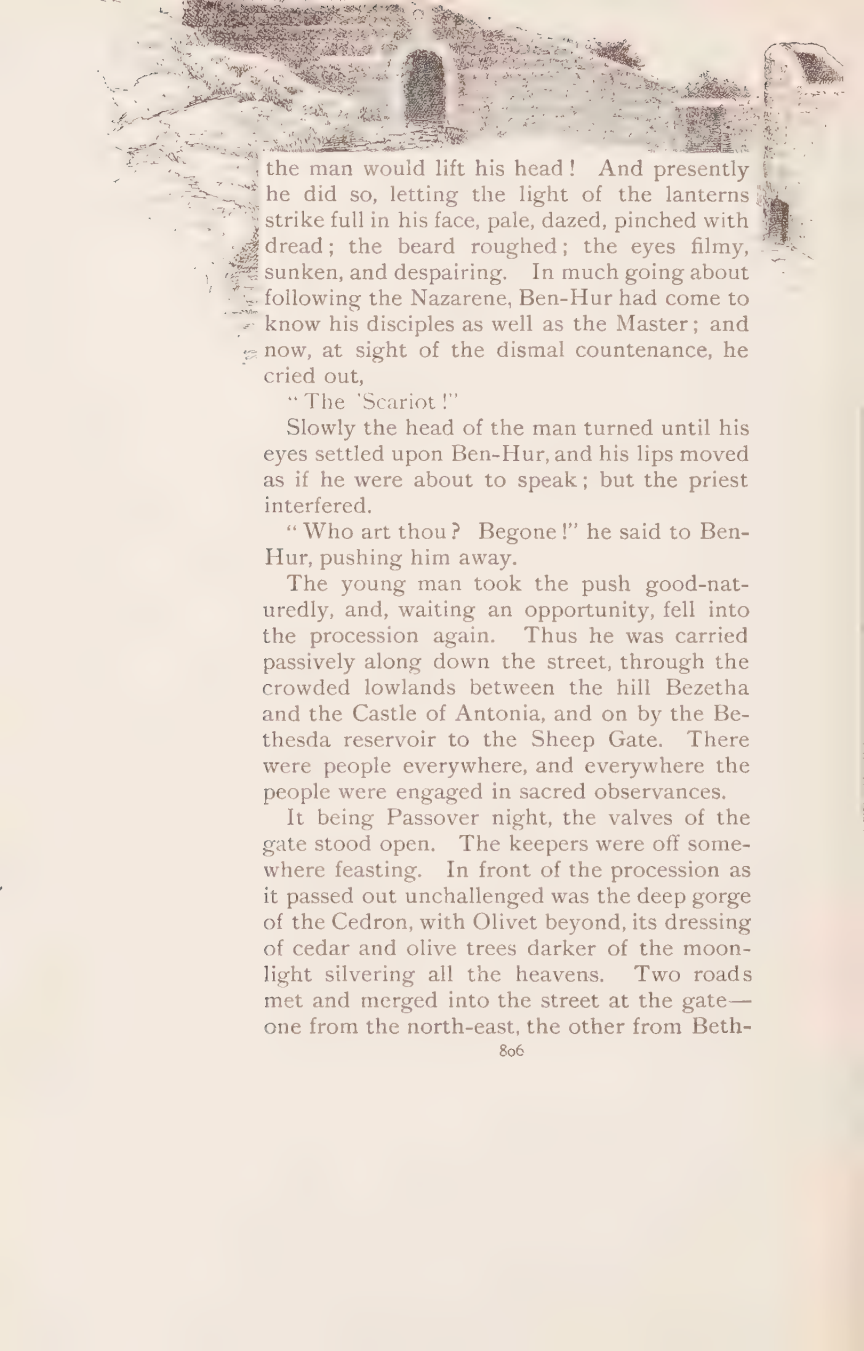
To make the place, it was necessary for him to cross the thoroughfare so soon to receive sorrowful Christian perpetuation. There also the pious celebration was at its height. Looking up the street, he noticed the flames of torches in motion streaming out like pennons; then he observed that the singing ceased where the torches came. His wonder rose to its highest, however, when he became certain that amid the smoke and dancing sparks he saw the keener sparkling of burnished spear-tips, arguing the presence of Roman soldiers. What were they, the scoffing legionaries, doing in a Jewish religious procession? The circumstance was unheard of, and he stayed to see the meaning of it.

The moon was shining its best; yet, as if the moon and the torches, and the fires in the street, and the rays streaming from windows and open doors were not enough to make the way clear, some of the processionists carried lighted lanterns; and fancying he discovered a special purpose in the use of such equipments, Ben-Hur stepped into the street so close to the line of march as to bring every one of the company under view while passing. The torches and the lanterns were being borne by servants, each of whom was armed with a bludgeon or a sharpened stave. Their present duty seemed to be to pick out the smoothest paths among the rocks in the street for certain

dignitaries among them—elders and priests; rabbis with long beards, heavy brows, and beaked noses; men of the class potential in the councils of Caiaphas and Hannas. Where could they be going? Not to the Temple, certainly, for the route to the sacred house from Zion, whence these appeared to be coming, was by the Xystus. And their business—if peaceful, why the soldiers?

As the procession began to go by Ben-Hur, his attention was particularly called to three persons walking together. They were well towards the front, and the servants who went before them with lanterns appeared unusually careful in the service. In the person moving on the left of this group he recognized a chief policeman of the Temple; the one on the right was a priest; the middle man was not at first so easily placed, as he walked leaning heavily upon the arms of the others, and carried his head so low upon his breast as to hide his face. His appearance was that of a prisoner not yet recovered from the fright of arrest, or being taken to something dreadful—to torture or death. The dignitaries helping him on the right and left, and the attention they gave him, made it clear that if he were not himself the object moving the party, he was at least in some way connected with the object—a witness or a guide, possibly an informer. So if it could be found who he was the business in hand might be shrewdly guessed. With great assurance, Ben-Hur fell in on the right of the priest, and walked along with him. Now if





the man would lift his head! And presently he did so, letting the light of the lanterns strike full in his face, pale, dazed, pinched with dread; the beard roughed; the eyes filmy, sunken, and despairing. In much going about following the Nazarene, Ben-Hur had come to know his disciples as well as the Master; and now, at sight of the dismal countenance, he cried out,

“The ‘Scariot!’”

Slowly the head of the man turned until his eyes settled upon Ben-Hur, and his lips moved as if he were about to speak; but the priest interfered.

“Who art thou? Begone!” he said to Ben-Hur, pushing him away.

The young man took the push good-naturedly, and, waiting an opportunity, fell into the procession again. Thus he was carried passively along down the street, through the crowded lowlands between the hill Bezetha and the Castle of Antonia, and on by the Bethesda reservoir to the Sheep Gate. There were people everywhere, and everywhere the people were engaged in sacred observances.

It being Passover night, the valves of the gate stood open. The keepers were off somewhere feasting. In front of the procession as it passed out unchallenged was the deep gorge of the Cedron, with Olivet beyond, its dressing of cedar and olive trees darker of the moonlight silvering all the heavens. Two roads met and merged into the street at the gate—one from the north-east, the other from Beth-

any. Ere Ben-Hur could finish wondering whether he were to go farther, and if so, which road was to be taken, he was led off down into the gorge. And still no hint of the purpose of the midnight march.

Down the gorge and over the bridge at the bottom of it. There was a great clatter on the floor as the crowd, now a straggling rabble, passed over beating and pounding with their clubs and staves. A little farther, and they turned off to the left in the direction of an olive orchard enclosed by a stone wall in view from the road. Ben-Hur knew there was nothing in the place but old gnarled trees, the grass, and a trough hewn out of a rock for the treading of oil after the fashion of the country. While, yet more wonder-struck, he was thinking what could bring such a company at such an hour to a quarter so lonesome, they were all brought to a stand-still. Voices called out excitedly in front; a chill sensation ran from man to man; there was a rapid falling back and a blind stumbling over each other. The soldiers alone kept their order.

It took Ben-Hur but a moment to disengage himself from the mob and run forward. There he found a gate-way without a gate admitting to the orchard, and he halted to take in the scene.

A man in white clothes, and bareheaded, was standing outside the entrance, his hands crossed before him—a slender, stooping figure, with long hair and thin face—in an attitude of resignation and waiting.

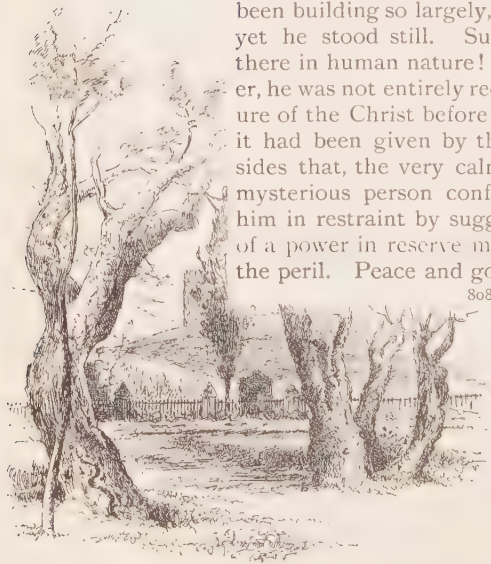


It was the Nazarene !

Behind him, next the gate-way, were the disciples in a group; they were excited, but no man was ever calmer than he. The torch-light beat redly upon him, giving his hair a tint ruddier than was natural to it; yet the expression of the countenance was as usual all gentleness and pity.

Opposite this most unmartial figure stood the rabble, gaping, silent, awed, cowering—ready at a sign of anger from him to break and run. And from him to them—then at Judas, conspicuous in their midst—Ben-Hur looked—one quick glance, and the object of the visit lay open to his understanding. Here was the betrayer, there the betrayed; and these with clubs and staves, and the legionaries, were brought to take him.

A man may not always tell what he will do until the trial is upon him. This was the emergency for which Ben-Hur had been for years preparing. The man to whose security he had devoted himself, and upon whose life he had been building so largely, was in personal peril; yet he stood still. Such contradictions are there in human nature! To say truth, O reader, he was not entirely recovered from the picture of the Christ before the Gate Beautiful as it had been given by the Egyptian; and besides that, the very calmness with which the mysterious person confronted the mob held him in restraint by suggesting the possession of a power in reserve more than sufficient for the peril. Peace and good-will, and love and



non-resistance, had been the burden of the Nazarene's teaching; would he put his preaching into practice? He was master of life; he could restore it when lost; he could take it at pleasure. What use would he make of the power now? Defend himself? And how? A word—a breath—a thought were sufficient. That there would be some signal exhibition of astonishing force beyond the natural Ben-Hur believed, and in that faith waited. And in all this he was still measuring the Nazarene by himself—by the human standard.

Presently the clear voice of the Christ arose.

"Whom seek ye?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," the priest replied.

"I am he."

At these simplest of words, spoken without passion or alarm, the assailants fell back several steps, the timid among them cowering to the ground; and they might have let him alone and gone away had not Judas walked over to him.

"Hail, master!"

With this friendly speech, he kissed him.

"Judas," said the Nazarene, mildly, "betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? Wherefore art thou come?"

Receiving no reply, the Master spoke to the crowd again.

"Whom seek ye?"

"Jesus of Nazareth."

"I have told you that I am he. If, therefore, you seek me, let these go their way."

At these words of entreaty the rabbis ad-



vanced upon him; and, seeing their intent, some of the disciples for whom he interceded drew nearer; one of them cut off a man's ear, but without saving the Master from being taken. And yet Ben-Hur stood still! Nay, while the officers were making ready with their ropes the Nazarene was doing his greatest charity—not the greatest in deed, but the very greatest in illustration of his forbearance, so far surpassing that of men.

"Suffer ye thus far," he said to the wounded man, and healed him with a touch.

Both friends and enemies were confounded—one side that he could do such a thing, the other that he would do it under the circumstances.

"Surely he will not allow them to bind him!" Thus thought Ben-Hur.

"Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" From the offending follower, the Nazarene turned to his captors. "Are you come out as against a thief, with swords and staves to take me? I was daily with you in the Temple, and you took me not; but this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

The posse plucked up courage and closed about him; and when Ben-Hur looked for the faithful they were gone—not one of them remained.

The crowd about the deserted man seemed very busy, with tongue, hand, and foot. Over their heads, between the torch-sticks, through the smoke, sometimes in openings between

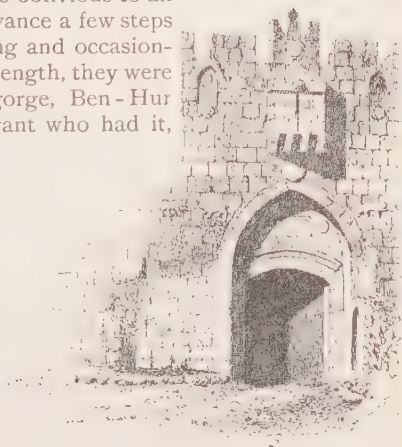


the restless men, Ben-Hur caught momentary glimpses of the prisoner. Never had anything struck him as so piteous, so unfriended, so forsaken! Yet, he thought, the man could have defended himself—he could have slain his enemies with a breath, but he would not. What was the cup his father had given him to drink? And who was the father to be so obeyed? Mystery upon mystery—not one, but many.

Directly the mob started in return to the city, the soldiers in the lead. Ben-Hur became anxious; he was not satisfied with himself. Where the torches were in the midst of the rabble he knew the Nazarene was to be found. Suddenly he resolved to see him again. He would ask him one question.

Taking off his long outer garment and the handkerchief from his head, he threw them upon the orchard wall, and started after the posse, which he boldly joined. Through the stragglers he made way, and by littles at length reached the man who carried the ends of the rope with which the prisoner was bound.

The Nazarene was walking slowly, his head down, his hands bound behind him; the hair fell thickly over his face, and he stooped more than usual; apparently he was oblivious to all going on around him. In advance a few steps were priests and elders talking and occasionally looking back. When, at length, they were all near the bridge in the gorge, Ben-Hur took the rope from the servant who had it, and stepped past him.





"Master, master!" he said, hurriedly, speaking close to the Nazarene's ear. "Dost thou hear, master? A word—one word. Tell me—"

The fellow from whom he had taken the rope now claimed it.

"Tell me," Ben-Hur continued, "goest thou with these of thine own accord?"

The people were come up now, and in his own ears asking angrily, "Who art thou, man?"

"O master," Ben-Hur made haste to say, his voice sharp with anxiety, "I am thy friend and lover. Tell me, I pray thee, if I bring rescue, wilt thou accept it?"

The Nazarene never so much as looked up or allowed the slightest sign of recognition; yet the something which when we are suffering is always telling it to such as look at us, though they be strangers, failed not now. "Let him alone," it seemed to say; "he has been abandoned by his friends; the world has denied him; in bitterness of spirit, he has taken farewell of men; he is going he knows not where, and he cares not. Let him alone."

And to that Ben-Hur was now driven. A dozen hands were upon him, and from all sides there was shouting, "He is one of them. Bring him along; club him—kill him!"

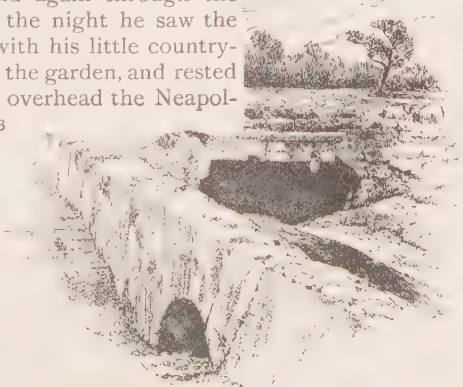
With a gust of passion which gave him many times his ordinary force, Ben-Hur raised himself, turned once about with his arms outstretched, shook the hands off, and rushed through the circle which was fast hemming him in. The hands snatching at him as he

passed tore his garments from his back, so he ran off the road naked ; and the gorge, in keeping of the friendly darkness, darker there than elsewhere, received him safe.

Reclaiming his handkerchief and outer garments from the orchard wall, he followed back to the city gate ; thence he went to the khan, and on the good horse rode to the tents of his people out by the Tombs of the Kings.

As he rode, he promised himself to see the Nazarene on the morrow — promised it, not knowing that the unfriended man was taken straightway to the house of Hannas to be tried that night.

The heart the young man carried to his couch beat so heavily he could not sleep ; for now clearly his renewed Judean kingdom resolved itself into what it was—only a dream. It is bad enough to see our castles overthrown one after another with an interval between in which to recover from the shock, or, at least, let the echoes of the fall die away ; but when they go altogether—go as ships sink, as houses tumble in earthquakes—the spirits which endure it calmly are made of stuffs sterner than common, and Ben-Hur's was not of them. Through vistas in the future, he began to catch glimpses of a life serenely beautiful, with a home instead of a palace of state, and Esther its mistress. Again and again through the leaden-footed hours of the night he saw the villa by Misenum, and with his little countrywoman strolled through the garden, and rested in the panelled atrium ; overhead the Neapol-



itan sky, at their feet the sunniest of sun-lands and the bluest of bays.

In plainest speech, he was entering upon a crisis with which to-morrow and the Nazarene will have everything to do.

CHAPTER IX THE GOING TO CALVARY

NEXT morning, about the second hour, two men rode full speed to the doors of Ben-Hur's tents, and, dismounting, asked to see him. He was not yet risen, but gave directions for their admission.

"Peace to you, brethren," he said, for they were of his Galileans, and trusted officers. "Will you be seated?"

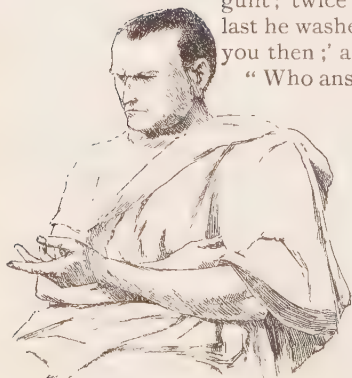
"Nay," the senior replied, bluntly, "to sit and be at ease is to let the Nazarene die. Rise, son of Judah, and go with us. The judgment has been given. The tree of the cross is already at Golgotha."

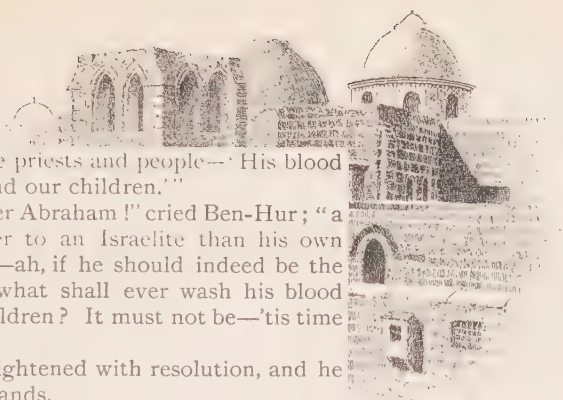
Ben-Hur stared at them.

"The cross!" was all he could for the moment say.

"They took him last night, and tried him," the man continued. "At dawn they led him before Pilate. Twice the Roman denied his guilt; twice he refused to give him over. At last he washed his hands, and said, 'Be it upon you then;' and they answered—"

"Who answered?"





"They—the priests and people—His blood be upon us and our children."

"Holy father Abraham!" cried Ben-Hur; "a Roman kinder to an Israelite than his own kin! And if—ah, if he should indeed be the son of God, what shall ever wash his blood from their children? It must not be—'tis time to fight!"

His face brightened with resolution, and he clapped his hands.

"The horses—and quickly!" he said to the Arab who answered the signal. "And bid Amrah send me fresh garments, and bring my sword! It is time to die for Israel, my friends. Tarry without till I come."

He ate a crust, drank a cup of wine, and was soon upon the road.

"Whither would you go first?" asked the Galilean.

"To collect the legions."

"Alas!" the man replied, throwing up his hands.

"Why alas?"

"Master"—the man spoke with shame—"master, I and my friend here are all that are faithful. The rest do follow the priests."

"Seeking what?" and Ben-Hur drew rein.

"To kill him."

"Not the Nazarene?"

"You have said it."

Ben-Hur looked slowly from one man to the other. He was hearing again the question of the night before: "The cup my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" In the ear of

the Nazarene he was putting his own question, "If I bring thee rescue, wilt thou accept it?" He was saying to himself, "This death may not be averted. The man has been travelling towards it with full knowledge from the day he began his mission: it is imposed by a will higher than his; whose but the Lord's? If he is consenting, if he goes to it voluntarily, what shall another do?" Nor less did Ben-Hur see the failure of the scheme he had built upon the fidelity of the Galileans; their desertion, in fact, left nothing more of it. But how singular it should happen that morning of all others! A dread seized him. It was possible his scheming, and labor, and expenditure of treasure might have been but blasphemous contention with God. When he picked up the reins and said, "Let us go, brethren," all before him was uncertainty. The faculty of resolving quickly, without which one cannot be a hero in the midst of stirring scenes, was numb within him.

"Let us go, brethren; let us to Golgotha."

They passed through excited crowds of people going south, like themselves. All the country north of the city seemed aroused and in motion.

Hearing that the procession with the condemned might be met with somewhere near the great white towers left by Herod, the three friends rode thither, passing round south-east of Akra. In the valley below the Pool of Hezekiah, passage-way against the multitude became impossible, and they were compelled to



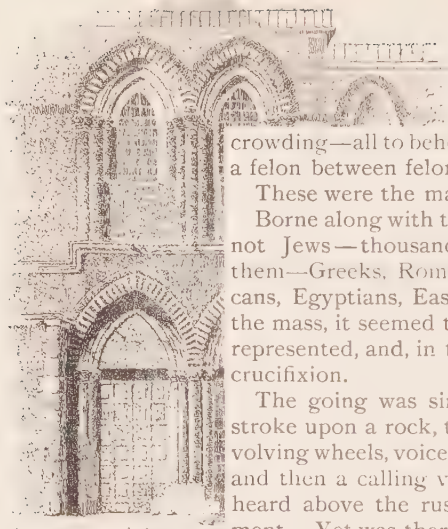
dismount, and take shelter behind the corner of a house and wait.

The waiting was as if they were on a river bank, watching a flood go by, for such the people seemed.

There are certain chapters in the First Book of this story which were written to give the reader an idea of the composition of the Jewish nationality as it was in the time of Christ. They were also written in anticipation of this hour and scene; so that he who has read them with attention can now see all Ben-Hur saw of the going to the crucifixion—a rare and wonderful sight!

Half an hour—an hour—the flood surged by Ben-Hur and his companions, within arm's reach, incessant, undiminished. At the end of that time he could have said, "I have seen all the castes of Jerusalem, all the sects of Judea, all the tribes of Israel, and all the nationalities of earth represented by them." The Libyan Jew went by, and the Jew of Egypt, and the Jew from the Rhine; in short, Jews from all East countries and all West countries, and all islands within commercial connection; they went by on foot, on horseback, on camels, in litters and chariots, and with an infinite variety of costumes, yet with the same marvellous similitude of features which to-day particularizes the children of Israel, tried as they have been by climates and modes of life; they went by speaking all known tongues, for by that means only were they distinguishable group from group; they went by in haste—eager, anxious,





crowding—all to behold one poor Nazarene die, a felon between felons.

These were the many, but they were not all.

Borne along with the stream were thousands not Jews—thousands hating and despising them—Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Syrians, Africans, Egyptians, Easterns. So that, studying the mass, it seemed the whole world was to be represented, and, in that sense, present at the crucifixion.

The going was singularly quiet. A hoof-stroke upon a rock, the glide and rattle of revolving wheels, voices in conversation, and now and then a calling voice, were all the sounds heard above the rustle of the mighty movement. Yet was there upon every countenance the look with which men make haste to see some dreadful sight, some sudden wreck, or ruin, or calamity of war. And by such signs Ben-Hur judged that these were the strangers in the city come up to the Passover, who had had no part in the trial of the Nazarene, and might be his friends.

At length, from the direction of the great towers, Ben-Hur heard, at first faint in the distance, a shouting of many men.

“Hark! they are coming now,” said one of his friends.

The people in the street halted to hear; but as the cry rang on over their heads, they looked at each other, and in shuddering silence moved along.

The shouting drew nearer each moment; and the air was already full of it and trembling,

when Ben-Hur saw the servants of Simonides coming with their master in his chair, and Esther walking by his side; a covered litter was next behind them.

"Peace to you, O Simonides—and to you, Esther," said Ben-Hur, meeting them. "If you are for Golgotha, stay until the procession passes; I will then go with you. There is room to turn in by the house here."

The merchant's large head rested heavily upon his breast; rousing himself, he answered, "Speak to Balthasar; his pleasure will be mine. He is in the litter."

Ben-Hur hastened to draw aside the curtain. The Egyptian was lying within, his wan face so pinched as to appear like a dead man's. The proposal was submitted to him.

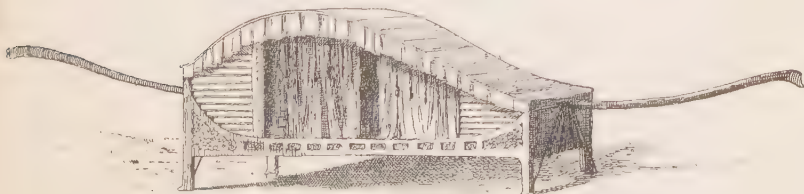
"Can we see him?" he inquired, faintly.

"The Nazarene? yes; he must pass within a few feet of us."

"Dear Lord!" the old man cried, fervently. "Once more, once more! Oh, it is a dreadful day for the world!"

Shortly the whole party were in waiting under shelter of the house. They said but little, afraid, probably, to trust their thoughts to each other; everything was uncertain, and nothing so much so as opinions. Balthasar drew himself feebly from the litter, and stood supported by a servant; Esther and Ben-Hur kept Simonides company.

Meantime the flood poured along, if anything, more densely than before; and the shouting came nearer, shrill up in the air,



hoarse along the earth, and cruel. At last the procession was up.

"See!" said Ben-Hur, bitterly; "that which cometh now is Jerusalem."

The advance was in possession of an army of boys, hooting and screaming, "The King of the Jews! Room, room for the King of the Jews!"

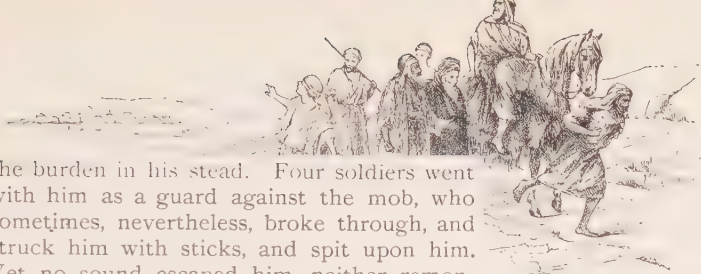
Simonides watched them as they whirled and danced along, like a cloud of summer insects, and said, gravely, "When these come to their inheritance, son of Hur, alas for the city of Solomon!"

A band of legionaries fully armed followed next, marching in sturdy indifference, the glory of burnished brass about them the while.

Then came the NAZARENE!

He was nearly dead. Every few steps he staggered as if he would fall. A stained gown badly torn hung from his shoulders over a seamless undertunic. His bare feet left red splotches upon the stones. An inscription on a board was tied to his neck. A crown of thorns had been crushed hard down upon his head, making cruel wounds from which streams of blood, now dry and blackened, had run over his face and neck. The long hair, tangled in the thorns, was clotted thick. The skin, where it could be seen, was ghastly white. His hands were tied before him. Back somewhere in the city he had fallen exhausted under the transverse beam of his cross, which, as a condemned person, custom required him to bear to the place of execution; now a countryman carried





the burden in his stead. Four soldiers went with him as a guard against the mob, who sometimes, nevertheless, broke through, and struck him with sticks, and spit upon him. Yet no sound escaped him, neither remonstrance nor groan; nor did he look up until he was nearly in front of the house sheltering Ben-Hur and his friends, all of whom were moved with quick compassion. Esther clung to her father; and he, strong of will as he was, trembled. Balthasar fell down speechless. Even Ben-Hur cried out, "O my God! my God!" Then, as if he divined their feelings or heard the exclamation, the Nazarene turned his wan face towards the party, and looked at them each one, so they carried the look in memory through life. They could see he was thinking of them, not himself, and the dying eyes gave them the blessing he was not permitted to speak.

"Where are thy legions, son of Hur?" asked Simonides, aroused.

"Hannas can tell thee better than I."

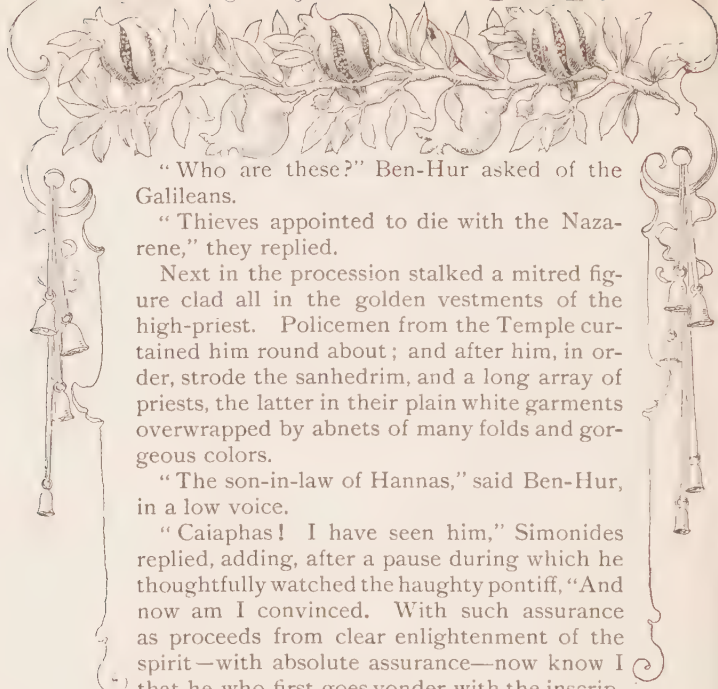
"What, faithless?"

"All but these two."

"Then all is lost, and this good man must die!"

The face of the merchant knit convulsively as he spoke, and his head sank upon his breast. He had borne his part in Ben-Hur's labors well, and he had been inspired by the same hopes, now blown out never to be rekindled.

Two other men succeeded the Nazarene bearing cross-beams.



"Who are these?" Ben-Hur asked of the Galileans.

"Thieves appointed to die with the Nazarene," they replied.

Next in the procession stalked a mitred figure clad all in the golden vestments of the high-priest. Policemen from the Temple curtailed him round about; and after him, in order, strode the sanhedrim, and a long array of priests, the latter in their plain white garments overwrapped by abnets of many folds and gorgeous colors.

"The son-in-law of Hannas," said Ben-Hur, in a low voice.

"Caiaphas! I have seen him," Simonides replied, adding, after a pause during which he thoughtfully watched the haughty pontiff, "And now am I convinced. With such assurance as proceeds from clear enlightenment of the spirit—with absolute assurance—now know I that he who first goes yonder with the inscription about his neck is what the inscription proclaims him—**KING OF THE JEWS**. A common man, an impostor, a felon, was never thus waited upon. For look! Here are the nations—Jerusalem, Israel. Here is the ephod, here the blue robe with its fringe, and purple pomegranates, and golden bells, not seen in the street since the day Jaddua went out to meet the Macedonian—proofs all that this Nazarene is King. Would I could rise and go after him!"

Ben-Hur listened surprised, and directly, as if himself awakened to his unusual display of feeling, Simonides said, impatiently,

"Speak to Balthasar, I pray you, and let us begone. The vomit of Jerusalem is coming."

Then Esther spoke.

"I see some women there, and they are weeping. Who are they?"

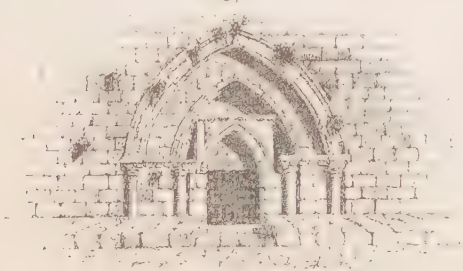
Following the point of her hand, the party beheld four women in tears; one of them leaned upon the arm of a man of aspect not unlike the Nazarene's. Presently Ben-Hur answered,

"The man is the disciple whom the Nazarene loves the best of all; she who leans upon his arm is Mary, the Master's mother; the others are friendly women of Galilee."

Esther pursued the mourners with glistening eyes until the multitude received them out of sight.

It may be the reader will fancy the foregoing snatches of conversation were had in quiet; but it was not so. The talking was, for the most part, like that indulged by people at the sea-side under the sound of the surf; for to nothing else can the clamor of this division of the mob be so well likened.

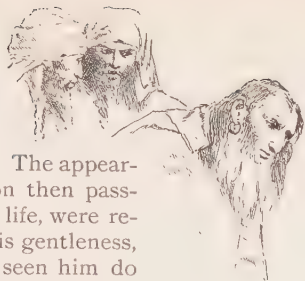
The demonstration was the forerunner of those in which, scarce thirty years later, under rule of the factions, the Holy City was torn to pieces; it was quite as great in numbers, as fanatical and bloodthirsty; boiled and raved, and had in it exactly the same elements—servants, camel-drivers, market-men, gate-keepers, gardeners, dealers in fruits and wines, proselytes, and foreigners not proselytes, watchmen and menials from the Temple, thieves, robbers, and the myriad not assignable to any class, but





who, on such occasions as this, appeared no one could say whence, hungry and smelling of caves and old tombs—bareheaded wretches with naked arms and legs, hair and beard in uncombed mats, and each with one garment the color of clay; beasts with abysmal mouths, in outcry effective as lions calling each other across desert spaces. Some of them had swords; a greater number flourished spears and javelins; though the weapons of the many were staves and knotted clubs, and slings, for which latter selected stones were stored in srips, and sometimes in sacks improvised from the foreskirts of their dirty tunics. Among the mass here and there appeared persons of high degree—scribes, elders, rabbis, Pharisees with broad fringing, Sadducees in fine cloaks—serving for the time as prompters and directors. If a throat tired of one cry, they invented another for it; if brassy lungs showed signs of collapse, they set them going again; and yet the clamor, loud and continuous as it was, could have been reduced to a few syllables—King of the Jews!—Room for the King of the Jews!—Defiler of the Temple!—Blasphemer of God!—Crucify him, crucify him! And of these cries the last one seemed in greatest favor, because, doubtless, it was more directly expressive of the wish of the mob, and helped to better articulate its hatred of the Nazarene.

“Come,” said Simonides, when Balthasar was ready to proceed—“come, let us forward.”



Ben-Hur did not hear the call. The appearance of the part of the procession then passing, its brutality and hunger for life, were reminding him of the Nazarene—his gentleness, and the many charities he had seen him do for suffering men. Suggestions beget suggestions; so he remembered suddenly his own great indebtedness to the man; the time he himself was in the hands of a Roman guard going, as was supposed, to a death as certain and almost as terrible as this one of the cross; the cooling drink he had at the well by Nazareth, and the divine expression of the face of him who gave it; the later goodness, the miracle of Palm-Sunday; and with these recollections, the thought of his present powerlessness to give back help for help or make return in kind stung him keenly, and he accused himself. He had not done all he might; he could have watched with the Galileans, and kept them true and ready; and this—ah! this was the moment to strike! A blow well given now would not merely disperse the mob and set the Nazarene free; it would be a trumpet-call to Israel, and precipitate the long-dreamed-of war for freedom. The opportunity was going; the minutes were bearing it away; and if lost! God of Abraham! Was there nothing to be done—nothing?

That instant a party of Galileans caught his eye. He rushed through the press and overtook them.

"Follow me," he said. "I would have speech with you."





The men obeyed him, and when they were under shelter of the house he spoke again :

"You are of those who took my swords, and agreed with me to strike for freedom and the King who was coming. You have the swords now, and now is the time to strike with them. Go, look everywhere, and find our brethren, and tell them to meet me at the tree of the cross making ready for the Nazarene. Haste all of you ! Nay, stand not so ! The Nazarene is the King, and freedom dies with him."

They looked at him respectfully, but did not move.

"Hear you ?" he asked.

Then one of them replied,

"Son of Judah"—by that name they knew him—"son of Judah, it is you who are deceived, not we or our brethren who have your swords. The Nazarene is not the King ; neither has he the spirit of a king. We were with him when he came into Jerusalem ; we saw him in the Temple ; he failed himself and us and Israel ; at the Gate Beautiful he turned his back upon God and refused the throne of David. He is not King, and Galilee is not with him. He shall die the death. But hear you, son of Judah. We have your swords, and we are ready now to draw them and strike for freedom ! and we will meet you at the tree of the cross."

The sovereign moment of his life was upon Ben-Hur. Could he have taken the offer and said the word, history might have been other than it is ; but then it would have been histo-

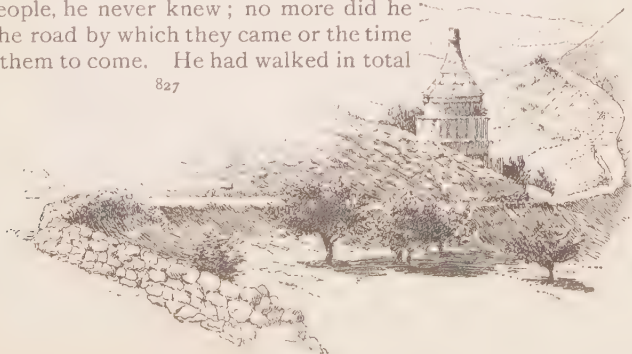
ry ordered by men, not God—something that never was, and never will be. A confusion fell upon him; he knew not how, though afterwards he attributed it to the Nazarene; for when the Nazarene was risen, he understood the death was necessary to faith in the resurrection, without which Christianity would be an empty husk. The confusion, as has been said, left him without the faculty of decision; he stood helpless—wordless even. Covering his face with his hand, he shook with the conflict between his wish, which was what he would have ordered, and the power that was upon him.

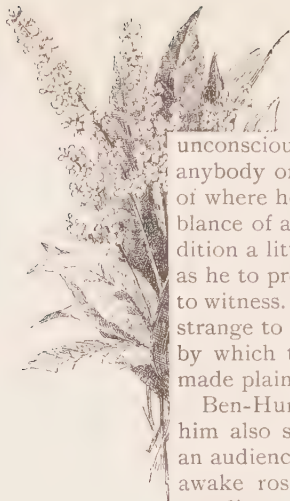
“Come; we are waiting for you,” said Simonides, the fourth time.

Thereupon he walked mechanically after the chair and the litter. Esther walked with him. Like Balthasar and his friends, the Wise Men, the day they went to the meeting in the desert, he was being led along the way.

CHAPTER X THE CRUCIFIXION

WHEN the party—Balthasar, Simonides, Ben-Hur, Esther, and the two faithful Galileans—reached the place of crucifixion, Ben-Hur was in advance leading them. How they had been able to make way through the great press of excited people, he never knew; no more did he know the road by which they came or the time it took them to come. He had walked in total





unconsciousness, neither hearing nor seeing anybody or anything, and without a thought of where he was going, or the ghostliest semblance of a purpose in his mind. In such condition a little child could have done as much as he to prevent the awful crime he was about to witness. The intentions of God are always strange to us ; but not more so than the means by which they are wrought out, and at last made plain to our belief.

Ben-Hur came to a stop ; those following him also stopped. As a curtain rises before an audience, the spell holding him in its sleep-awake rose, and he saw with a clear understanding.

There was a space upon the top of a low knoll rounded like a skull, and dry, dusty, and without vegetation, except some scrubby hys-sop. The boundary of the space was a living wall of men, with men behind struggling, some to look over, others to look through it. An inner wall of Roman soldiery held the dense outer wall rigidly to its place. A centurion kept eye upon the soldiers. Up to the very line so vigilantly guarded Ben-Hur had been led ; at the line he now stood, his face to the north-west. The knoll was the old Aramaic Golgotha—in Latin, Calvaria ; anglicized, Calvary ; translated, The Skull.

On its slopes, in the low places, on the swells and higher hills, the earth sparkled with a strange enamelling. Look where he would outside the walled space, he saw no patch of brown soil, no rock, no green thing ; he saw only thou-

sands of eyes in ruddy faces ; off a little way in the perspective only ruddy faces without eyes ; off a little farther only a broad, broad circle, which the nearer view instructed him was also of faces. And this was the ensemble of three millions of people ; under it three millions of hearts throbbing with passionate interest in what was taking place upon the knoll ; indifferent as to the thieves, caring only for the Nazarene, and for him only as he was an object of hate or fear or curiosity—he who loved them all, and was about to die for them.

In the spectacle of a great assemblage of people there are always the bewilderment and fascination one feels while looking over a stretch of sea in agitation, and never had this one been exceeded ; yet Ben-Hur gave it but a passing glance, for that which was going on in the space described would permit no division of his interest.

Up on the knoll so high as to be above the living wall, and visible over the heads of an attending company of notables, conspicuous because of his mitre and vestments and his haughty air, stood the high-priest. Up the knoll still higher, up quite to the round summit, so as to be seen far and near, was the Nazarene, stooped and suffering, but silent. The wit among the guard had complemented the crown upon his head by putting a reed in his hand for a sceptre. Clamors blew upon him like blasts—laughter—execrations—sometimes both together indistinguishably. A man—only a man, O reader, would have charged the blasts with





the remainder of his love for the race, and let it go forever.

All the eyes then looking were fixed upon the Nazarene. It may have been pity with which he was moved; whatever the cause, Ben-Hur was conscious of a change in his feelings. A conception of something better than the best of this life—something so much better that it could serve a weak man with strength to endure agonies of spirit as well as of body; something to make death welcome—perhaps another life purer than this one—perhaps the spirit-life which Balthasar held to so fast, began to dawn upon his mind clearer and clearer, bringing to him a certain sense that, after all, the mission of the Nazarene was that of guide across the boundary for such as loved him; across the boundary to where his kingdom was set up and waiting for him. Then, as something borne through the air out of the almost forgotten, he heard again, or seemed to hear, the saying of the Nazarene,

“I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.”

And the words repeated themselves over and over, and took form, and the dawn touched them with its light, and filled them with a new meaning. And as men repeat a question to grasp and fix the meaning, he asked, gazing at the figure on the hill fainting under its crown, Who the Resurrection? and who the Life?

“I AM,”

the figure seemed to say—and say it for him; for instantly he was sensible of a peace such

as he had never known—the peace which is the end of doubt and mystery, and the beginning of faith and love and clear understanding.

From this dreamy state Ben-Hur was aroused by the sound of hammering. On the summit of the knoll he observed then what had escaped him before—some soldiers and workmen preparing the crosses. The holes for planting the trees were ready, and now the transverse beams were being fitted to their places.

“Bid the men make haste,” said the high-priest to the centurion. “These”—and he pointed to the Nazarene—“must be dead by the going-down of the sun, and buried that the land may not be defiled. Such is the Law.”

With a better mind, a soldier went to the Nazarene and offered him something to drink, but he refused the cup. Then another went to him and took from his neck the board with the inscription upon it, which he nailed to the tree of the cross—and the preparation was complete.

“The crosses are ready,” said the centurion to the pontiff, who received the report with a wave of the hand and the reply,

“Let the blasphemer go first. The Son of God should be able to save himself. We will see.”

The people to whom the preparation in its several stages was visible, and who to this time had assailed the hill with incessant cries of impatience, permitted a lull which directly became a universal hush. The part of the infliction most shocking, at least to the thought,



was reached—the men were to be nailed to their crosses. When for that purpose the soldiers laid their hands upon the Nazarene first, a shudder passed through the great concourse; the most brutalized shrank with dread. Afterwards there were those who said the air suddenly chilled and made them shiver.

“How very still it is!” Esther said, as she put her arm about her father’s neck.

And remembering the torture he himself had suffered, he drew her face down upon his breast, and sat trembling.

“Avoid it, Esther, avoid it!” he said. “I know not but all who stand and see it—the innocent as well as the guilty—may be cursed from this hour.”

Balthasar sank upon his knees.

“Son of Hur,” said Simonides, with increasing excitement—“son of Hur, if Jehovah stretch not forth his hand, and quickly, Israel is lost—and we are lost,”

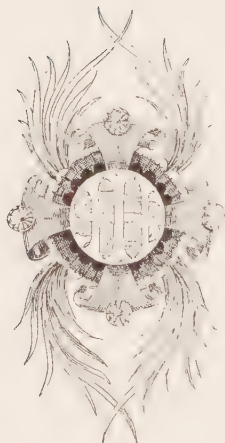
Ben-Hur answered, calmly, “I have been in a dream, Simonides, and heard in it why all this should be, and why it should go on. It is the will of the Nazarene—it is God’s will. Let us do as the Egyptian here—let us hold our peace and pray.”

As he looked up on the knoll again, the words were wafted to him through the awful stillness—

“I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.”

He bowed reverently as to a person speaking.

Up on the summit meantime the work went



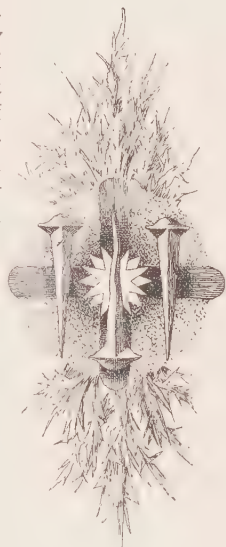
on. The guard took the Nazarene's clothes from him ; so that he stood before the millions naked. The stripes of the scourging he had received in the early morning were still bloody upon his back ; yet he was laid pitilessly down, and stretched upon the cross—first, the arms upon the transverse beam ; the spikes were sharp—a few blows, and they were driven through the tender palms ; next, they drew his knees up until the soles of his feet rested flat upon the tree ; then they placed one foot upon the other, and one spike fixed both of them fast. The dulled sound of the hammering was heard outside the guarded space ; and such as could not hear, yet saw the hammer as it fell, shivered with fear. And withal not a groan, or cry, or word of remonstrance from the sufferer : nothing at which an enemy could laugh ; nothing a lover could regret.

“ Which way wilt thou have him faced ? ” asked a soldier, bluntly.

“ Towards the Temple,” the pontiff replied. “ In dying I would have him see the holy house hath not suffered by him.”

The workmen put their hands to the cross, and carried it, burden and all, to the place of planting. At a word, they dropped the tree into the hole ; and the body of the Nazarene also dropped heavily, and hung by the bleeding hands. Still no cry of pain—only the exclamation divinest of all recorded exclamations,

“ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

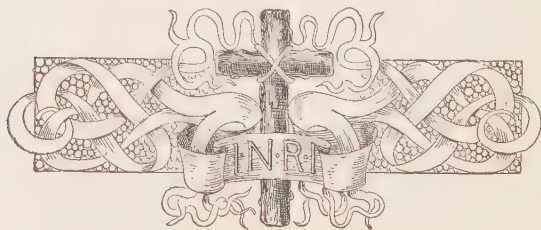


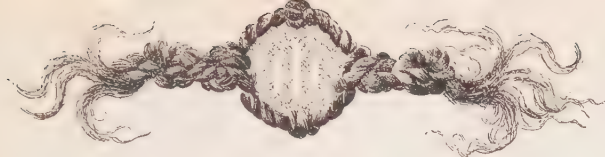
The cross, reared now above all other objects, and standing singly out against the sky, was greeted with a burst of delight; and all who could see and read the writing upon the board over the Nazarene's head made haste to decipher it. Soon as read, the legend was adopted by them and communicated, and presently the whole mighty concourse was ringing the salutation from side to side, and repeating it with laughter and groans,

"King of the Jews! Hail, King of the Jews!"

The pontiff, with a clearer idea of the import of the inscription, protested against it, but in vain; so the titled King, looking from the knoll with dying eyes, must have had the city of his fathers at rest below him—she who had so ignominiously cast him out.

The sun was rising rapidly to noon; the hills bared their brown breasts lovingly to it; the more distant mountains rejoiced in the purple with which it so regally dressed them. In the city, the temples, palaces, towers, pinnacles, and all points of beauty and prominence seemed to lift themselves into the unrivalled brilliance, as if they knew the pride they were giving the many who from time to time turned to look at them. Suddenly a dimness began to fill the sky and cover the earth—at first no more than a scarce perceptible fading of the day; a twilight out of time; an evening gliding in upon the splendors of noon. But it deepened, and directly drew attention; whereat the noise of the shouting and laughter fell off, and men, doubting their senses, gazed at





each other curiously : then they looked to the sun again ; then at the mountains, getting farther away ; at the sky and the near landscape, sinking in shadow ; at the hill upon which the tragedy was enacting ; and from all these they gazed at each other again, and turned pale, and held their peace.

"It is only a mist or passing cloud," Simonides said, soothingly, to Esther, who was alarmed. "It will brighten presently."

Ben-Hur did not think so.

"It is not a mist or a cloud," he said. "The spirits who live in the air—the prophets and saints—are at work in mercy to themselves and nature. I say to you, O Simonides, truly as God lives, he who hangs yonder is the Son of God."

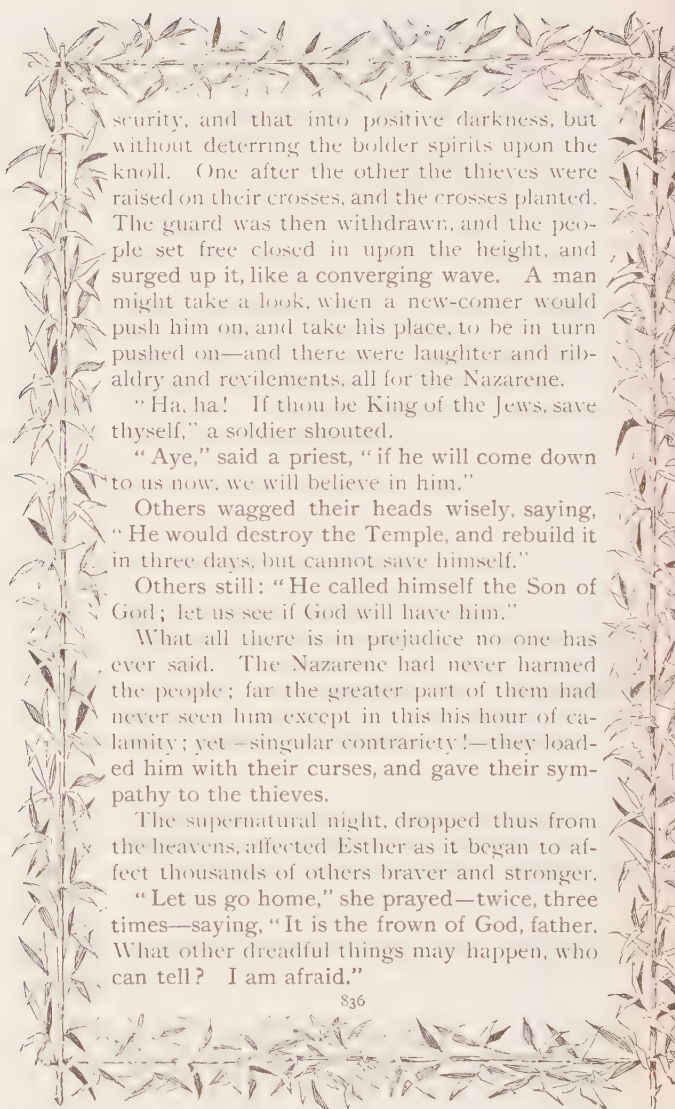
And leaving Simonides lost in wonder at such a speech from him, he went where Balthasar was kneeling near by, and laid his hand upon the good man's shoulder.

"O wise Egyptian, hearken ! Thou alone wert right—the Nazarene is indeed the Son of God."

Balthasar drew him down to him, and replied, feebly, "I saw him a child in the manger where he was first laid ; it is not strange that I knew him sooner than thou ; but oh that I should live to see this day ! Would I had died with my brethren ! Happy Melchior ! Happy, happy Gaspar !"

"Comfort thee !" said Ben-Hur. "Doubtless they, too, are here."

The dimness went on deepening into ob-



scurity, and that into positive darkness, but without deterring the bolder spirits upon the knoll. One after the other the thieves were raised on their crosses, and the crosses planted. The guard was then withdrawn, and the people set free closed in upon the height, and surged up it, like a converging wave. A man might take a look, when a new-comer would push him on, and take his place, to be in turn pushed on—and there were laughter and ribaldry and revilements, all for the Nazarene.

"Ha, ha! If thou be King of the Jews, save thyself," a soldier shouted.

"Aye," said a priest, "if he will come down to us now, we will believe in him."

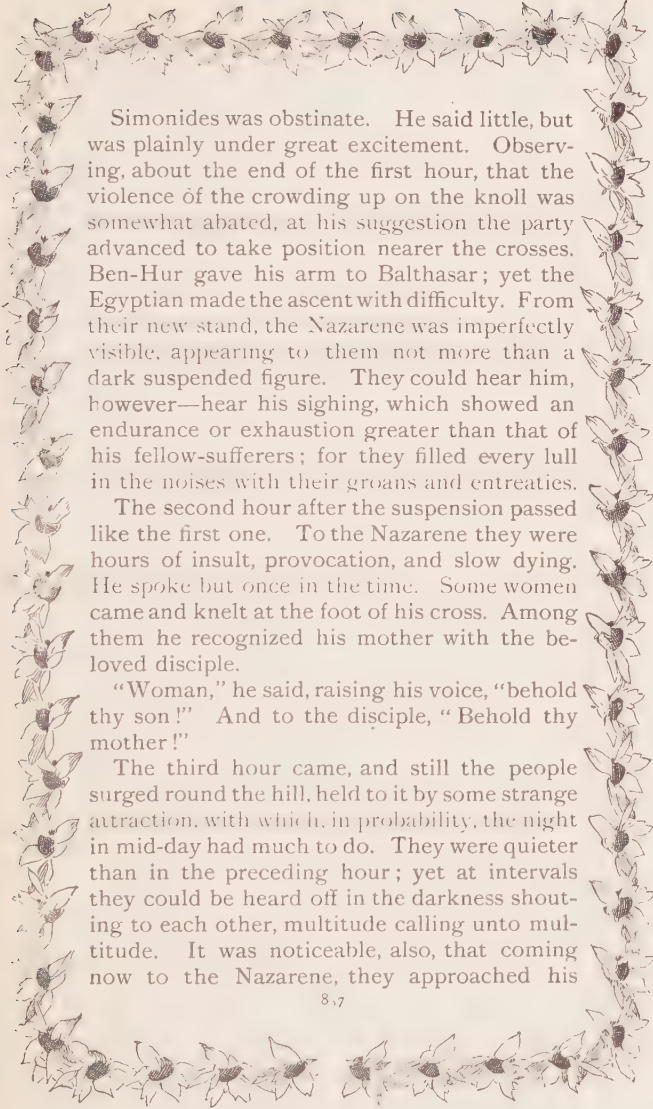
Others wagged their heads wisely, saying, "He would destroy the Temple, and rebuild it in three days, but cannot save himself."

Others still: "He called himself the Son of God; let us see if God will have him."

What all there is in prejudice no one has ever said. The Nazarene had never harmed the people; far the greater part of them had never seen him except in this his hour of calamity; yet—singular contrariety!—they loaded him with their curses, and gave their sympathy to the thieves.

The supernatural night, dropped thus from the heavens, affected Esther as it began to affect thousands of others braver and stronger.

"Let us go home," she prayed—twice, three times—saying, "It is the frown of God, father. What other dreadful things may happen, who can tell? I am afraid."

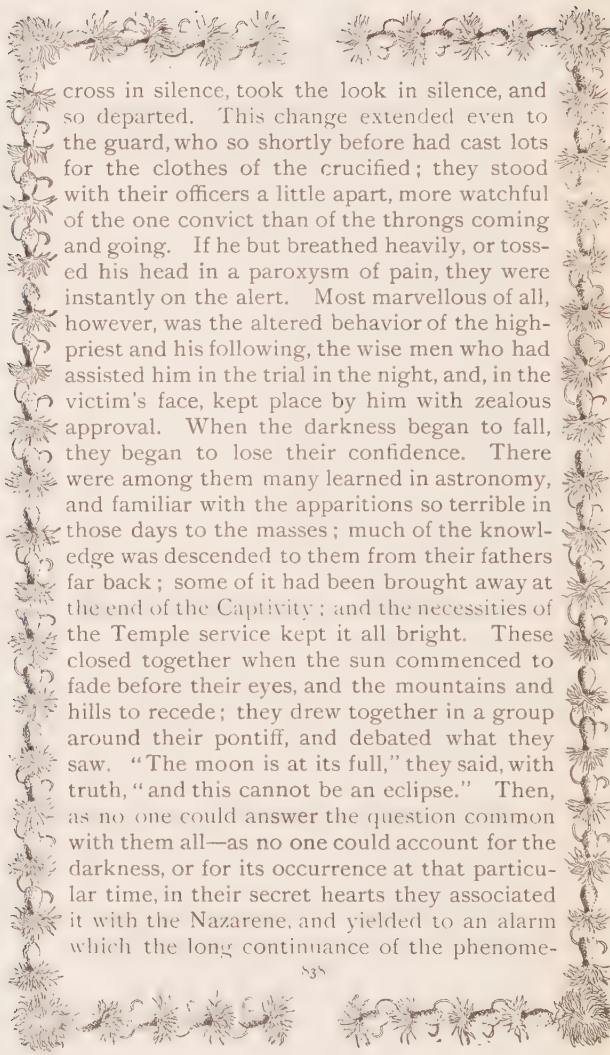


Simonides was obstinate. He said little, but was plainly under great excitement. Observing, about the end of the first hour, that the violence of the crowding up on the knoll was somewhat abated, at his suggestion the party advanced to take position nearer the crosses. Ben-Hur gave his arm to Balthasar; yet the Egyptian made the ascent with difficulty. From their new stand, the Nazarene was imperfectly visible, appearing to them not more than a dark suspended figure. They could hear him, however—hear his sighing, which showed an endurance or exhaustion greater than that of his fellow-sufferers; for they filled every lull in the noises with their groans and entreaties.

The second hour after the suspension passed like the first one. To the Nazarene they were hours of insult, provocation, and slow dying. He spoke but once in the time. Some women came and knelt at the foot of his cross. Among them he recognized his mother with the beloved disciple.

"Woman," he said, raising his voice, "behold thy son!" And to the disciple, "Behold thy mother!"

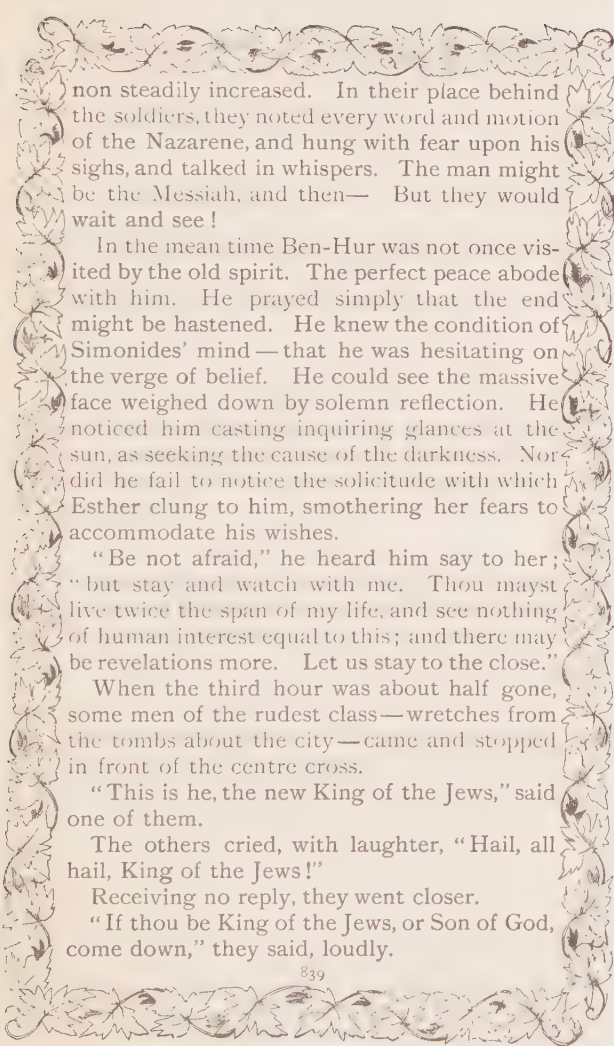
The third hour came, and still the people surged round the hill, held to it by some strange attraction, with which, in probability, the night in mid-day had much to do. They were quieter than in the preceding hour; yet at intervals they could be heard off in the darkness shouting to each other, multitude calling unto multitude. It was noticeable, also, that coming now to the Nazarene, they approached his

A decorative border of stylized flowers and leaves runs along the top, bottom, and sides of the page, framing the text.

cross in silence, took the look in silence, and so departed. This change extended even to the guard, who so shortly before had cast lots for the clothes of the crucified; they stood with their officers a little apart, more watchful of the one convict than of the throngs coming and going. If he but breathed heavily, or tossed his head in a paroxysm of pain, they were instantly on the alert. Most marvellous of all, however, was the altered behavior of the high-priest and his following, the wise men who had assisted him in the trial in the night, and, in the victim's face, kept place by him with zealous approval. When the darkness began to fall, they began to lose their confidence. There were among them many learned in astronomy, and familiar with the apparitions so terrible in those days to the masses; much of the knowledge was descended to them from their fathers far back; some of it had been brought away at the end of the Captivity; and the necessities of the Temple service kept it all bright. These closed together when the sun commenced to fade before their eyes, and the mountains and hills to recede; they drew together in a group around their pontiff, and debated what they saw. "The moon is at its full," they said, with truth, "and this cannot be an eclipse." Then, as no one could answer the question common with them all—as no one could account for the darkness, or for its occurrence at that particular time, in their secret hearts they associated it with the Nazarene, and yielded to an alarm which the long continuance of the phenome-



SUMMIT OF MOUNT OF OLIVES

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non steadily increased. In their place behind the soldiers, they noted every word and motion of the Nazarene, and hung with fear upon his sighs, and talked in whispers. The man might be the Messiah, and then— But they would wait and see!

In the mean time Ben-Hur was not once visited by the old spirit. The perfect peace abode with him. He prayed simply that the end might be hastened. He knew the condition of Simonides' mind—that he was hesitating on the verge of belief. He could see the massive face weighed down by solemn reflection. He noticed him casting inquiring glances at the sun, as seeking the cause of the darkness. Nor did he fail to notice the solicitude with which Esther clung to him, smothering her fears to accommodate his wishes.

"Be not afraid," he heard him say to her; "but stay and watch with me. Thou mayst live twice the span of my life, and see nothing of human interest equal to this; and there may be revelations more. Let us stay to the close."

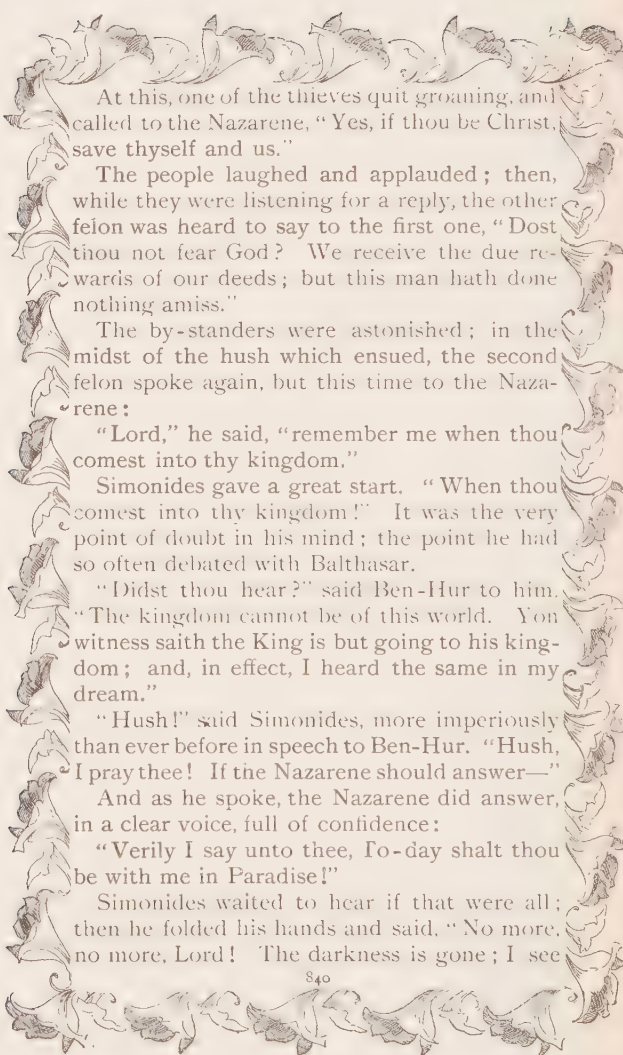
When the third hour was about half gone, some men of the rudest class—wretches from the tombs about the city—came and stopped in front of the centre cross.

"This is he, the new King of the Jews," said one of them.

The others cried, with laughter, "Hail, all hail, King of the Jews!"

Receiving no reply, they went closer.

"If thou be King of the Jews, or Son of God, come down," they said, loudly.

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At this, one of the thieves quit groaning, and called to the Nazarene, "Yes, if thou be Christ, save thyself and us."

The people laughed and applauded; then, while they were listening for a reply, the other felon was heard to say to the first one, "Dost thou not fear God? We receive the due rewards of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss."

The by-standers were astonished; in the midst of the hush which ensued, the second felon spoke again, but this time to the Nazarene:

"Lord," he said, "remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."

Simonides gave a great start. "When thou comest into thy kingdom!" It was the very point of doubt in his mind; the point he had so often debated with Balthasar.

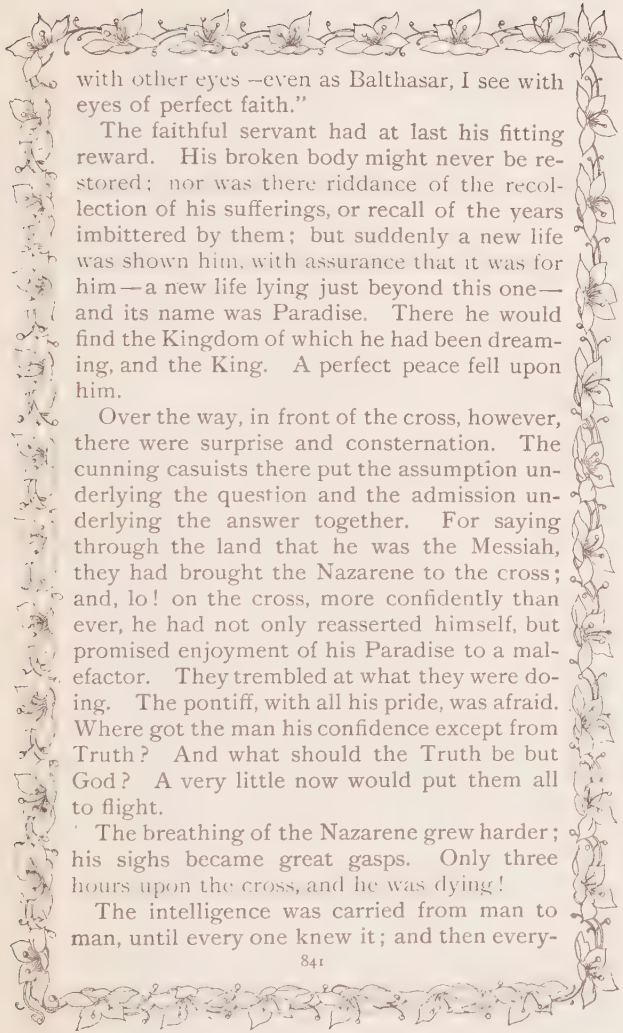
"Didst thou hear?" said Ben-Hur to him. "The kingdom cannot be of this world. Yon witness saith the King is but going to his kingdom; and, in effect, I heard the same in my dream."

"Hush!" said Simonides, more imperiously than ever before in speech to Ben-Hur. "Hush, I pray thee! If the Nazarene should answer—"

And as he spoke, the Nazarene did answer, in a clear voice, full of confidence:

"Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise!"

Simonides waited to hear if that were all; then he folded his hands and said, "No more, no more, Lord! The darkness is gone; I see

A decorative border of stylized flowers and leaves runs along the top, bottom, and sides of the page, framing the text.

with other eyes—even as Balthasar, I see with eyes of perfect faith.”

The faithful servant had at last his fitting reward. His broken body might never be restored; nor was there riddance of the recollection of his sufferings, or recall of the years imbittered by them; but suddenly a new life was shown him, with assurance that it was for him—a new life lying just beyond this one—and its name was Paradise. There he would find the Kingdom of which he had been dreaming, and the King. A perfect peace fell upon him.

Over the way, in front of the cross, however, there were surprise and consternation. The cunning casuists there put the assumption underlying the question and the admission underlying the answer together. For saying through the land that he was the Messiah, they had brought the Nazarene to the cross; and, lo! on the cross, more confidently than ever, he had not only reasserted himself, but promised enjoyment of his Paradise to a malefactor. They trembled at what they were doing. The pontiff, with all his pride, was afraid. Where got the man his confidence except from Truth? And what should the Truth be but God? A very little now would put them all to flight.

The breathing of the Nazarene grew harder; his sighs became great gasps. Only three hours upon the cross, and he was dying!

The intelligence was carried from man to man, until every one knew it; and then every-

thing hushed; the breeze faltered and died; a stifling vapor loaded the air; heat was super-added to darkness; nor might any one unknowing the fact have thought that off the hill, out under the overhanging pall, there were three millions of people waiting awe-struck what should happen next—they were so still!

Then there went out through the gloom, over the heads of such as were on the hill within hearing of the dying man, a cry of despair, if not reproach:

“My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?”

The voice startled all who heard it. One it touched uncontrollably,

The soldiers in coming had brought with them a vessel of wine and water, and set it down a little way from Ben-Hur. With a sponge dipped into the liquor, and put on the end of a stick, they could moisten the tongue of a sufferer at their pleasure. Ben-Hur thought of the draught he had had at the well near Nazareth; an impulse seized him; catching up the sponge, he dipped it into the vessel, and started for the cross.

“Let him be!” the people in the way shouted, angrily. “Let him be!”

Without minding them, he ran on, and put the sponge to the Nazarene’s lips.

Too late, too late!

The face then plainly seen by Ben-Hur, bruised and black with blood and dust as it was, lighted nevertheless with a sudden glow;

the eyes opened wide, and fixed upon some one visible to them alone in the far heavens; and there were content and relief, even triumph, in the shout the victim gave.

"It is finished! It is finished!"

So a hero, dying in the doing a great deed, celebrates his success with a last cheer.

The light in the eyes went out; slowly the crowned head sank upon the laboring breast. Ben-Hur thought the struggle over; but the fainting soul recollected itself, so that he and those around him caught the other and last words, spoken in a low voice, as if to one listening close by:

"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

A tremor shook the tortured body; there was a scream of fiercest anguish, and the mission and the earthly life were over at once. The heart, with all its love, was broken; for of that, O reader, the man died!

Ben-Hur went back to his friends, saying, simply, "It is over; he is dead."

In a space incredibly short the multitude was informed of the circumstance. No one repeated it aloud; there was a murmur which spread from the knoll in every direction; a murmur that was little more than a whispering, "He is dead! he is dead!" and that was all. The people had their wish; the Nazarene was dead; yet they stared at each other aghast. His blood was upon them! And while they stood staring at each other, the ground commenced to shake; each man took hold of his



A faint, high-contrast illustration at the top of the page shows three crosses on a hill. The central cross is the largest and most prominent, flanked by two smaller crosses. The background is dark and textured, suggesting a landscape or sky.

neighbor to support himself; in a twinkling the darkness disappeared, and the sun came out; and everybody, as with the same glance, beheld the crosses upon the hill all reeling drunken-like in the earthquake. They beheld all three of them; but the one in the centre was arbitrary; it alone would be seen; and for that it seemed to extend itself upward, and lift its burden, and swing it to and fro higher and higher in the blue of the sky. And every man among them who had jeered at the Nazarene; every one who had struck him; every one who had voted to crucify him; every one who had marched in the procession from the city; every one who had in his heart wished him dead, and they were as ten to one, felt that he was in some way individually singled out from the many, and that if he would live he must get away quickly as possible from that menace in the sky. They started to run; they ran with all their might; on horseback, and camels, and in chariots they ran, as well as on foot; but then, as if it were mad at them for what they had done, and had taken up the cause of the unoffending and friendless dead, the earthquake pursued them, and tossed them about, and flung them down, and terrified them yet more by the horrible noise of great rocks grinding and rending beneath them. They beat their breasts and shrieked with fear. His blood was upon them! The home-bred and the foreign, priest and layman, beggar, Sadducee, Pharisee, were overtaken in the race, and tumbled about indiscriminately. If they called

on the Lord, the outraged earth answered for him in fury, and dealt them all alike. It did not even know wherein the high-priest was better than his guilty brethren; overtaking him, it tripped him up also, and smirched the fringing of his robe, and filled the golden bells with sand, and his mouth with dust. He and his people were alike in the one thing at least—the blood of the Nazarene was upon them all!

When the sunlight broke upon the crucifixion, the mother of the Nazarene, the disciple, and the faithful women of Galilee, the centurion and his soldiers, and Ben-Hur and his party, were all who remained upon the hill. These had not time to observe the flight of the multitude; they were too loudly called upon to take care of themselves.

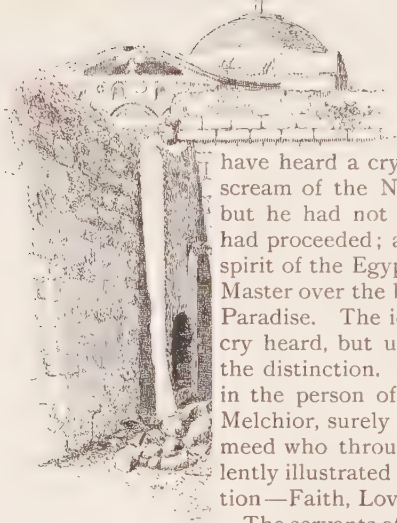
"Seat thyself here," said Ben-Hur to Esther, making a place for her at her father's feet. "Now cover thine eyes, and look not up; but put thy trust in God, and the spirit of yon just man so foully slain."

"Nay," said Simonides, reverently, "let us henceforth speak of him as the Christ."

"Be it so," said Ben-Hur.

Presently a wave of the earthquake struck the hill. The shrieks of the thieves upon the reeling crosses were terrible to hear. Though giddy with the movements of the ground, Ben-Hur had time to look at Balthasar, and beheld him prostrate and still. He ran to him and called—there was no reply. The good man was dead! Then Ben-Hur remembered to





have heard a cry in answer, as it were, to the scream of the Nazarene in his last moment; but he had not looked to see from whom it had proceeded; and ever after he believed the spirit of the Egyptian accompanied that of his Master over the boundary into the kingdom of Paradise. The idea rested not only upon the cry heard, but upon the exceeding fitness of the distinction. If faith were worthy reward in the person of Gaspar, and love in that of Melchior, surely he should have some special meed who through a long life had so excellently illustrated the three virtues in combination—Faith, Love, and Good Works.

The servants of Balthasar had deserted their master; but when all was over, the two Galileans bore the old man in his litter back to the city.

It was a sorrowful procession that entered the south gate of the palace of the Hurs about the set of sun that memorable day. About the same hour the body of the Christ was taken down from the cross.

The remains of Balthasar were carried to the guest-chamber. All the servants hastened weeping to see him; for he had the love of every living thing with which he had in anywise to do; but when they beheld his face, and the smile upon it, they dried their tears, saying, "It is well. He is happier this evening than when he went out in the morning."

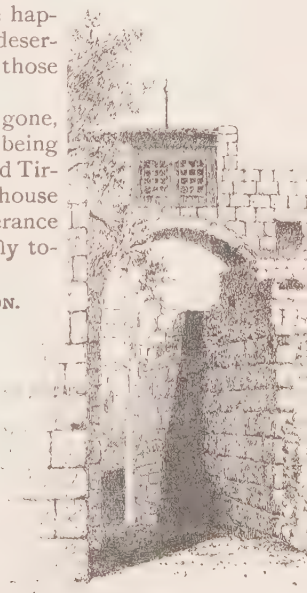
Ben-Hur would not trust a servant to inform Iras what had befallen her father. He went himself to see her and bring her to the

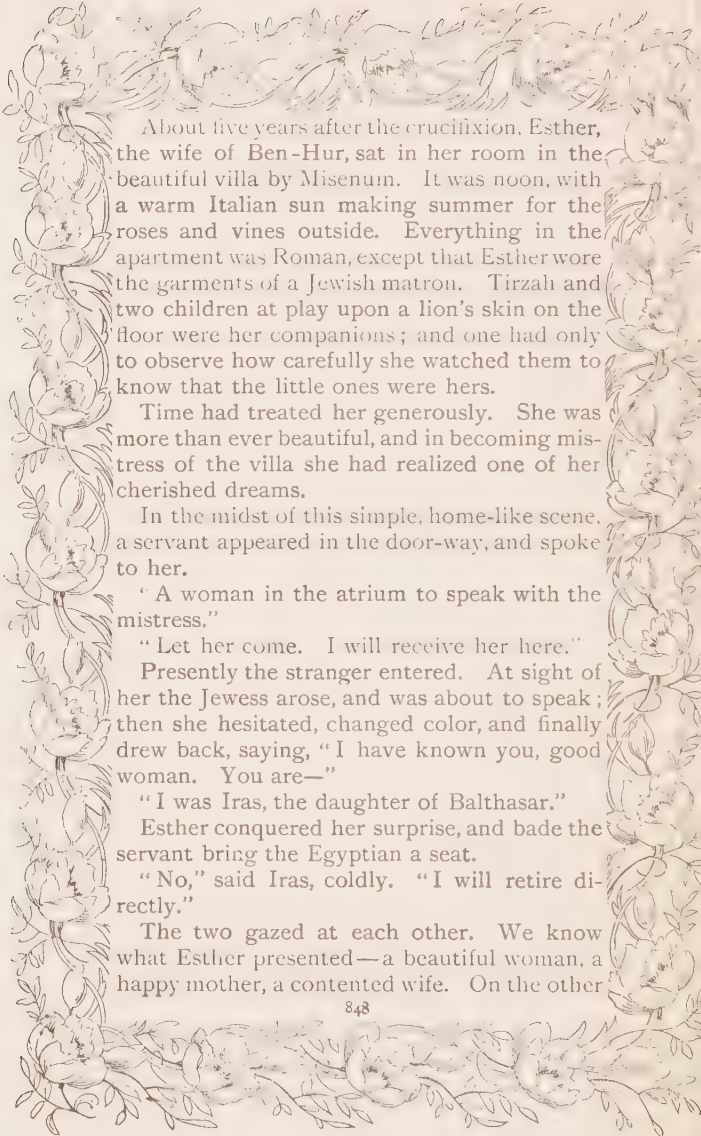
body. He imagined her grief; she would now be alone in the world; it was a time to forgive and pity her. He remembered he had not asked why she was not of the party in the morning, or where she was; he remembered he had not thought of her; and, from shame, he was ready to make any amends, the more so as he was about to plunge her into such acute grief.

He shook the curtains of her door; and though he heard the ringing of the little bells echoing within, he had no response; he called her name, and again he called — still no answer. He drew the curtain aside and went into the room; she was not there. He ascended hastily to the roof in search of her; nor was she there. He questioned the servants; none of them had seen her during the day. After a long quest everywhere through the house, Ben-Hur returned to the guest-chamber, and took the place by the dead which should have been hers; and he bethought him there how merciful the Christ had been to his aged servant. At the gate of the kingdom of Paradise happily the afflictions of this life, even its desertions, are left behind and forgotten by those who go in and rest.

When the gloom of the burial was nigh gone, on the ninth day after the healing, the law being fulfilled, Ben-Hur brought his mother and Tirzah home; and from that day, in that house the most sacred names possible of utterance by men were always coupled worshipfully together,

GOD THE FATHER AND CHRIST THE SON.





About five years after the crucifixion, Esther, the wife of Ben-Hur, sat in her room in the beautiful villa by Misenum. It was noon, with a warm Italian sun making summer for the roses and vines outside. Everything in the apartment was Roman, except that Esther wore the garments of a Jewish matron. Tirzah and two children at play upon a lion's skin on the floor were her companions; and one had only to observe how carefully she watched them to know that the little ones were hers.

Time had treated her generously. She was more than ever beautiful, and in becoming mistress of the villa she had realized one of her cherished dreams.

In the midst of this simple, home-like scene, a servant appeared in the door-way, and spoke to her.

"A woman in the atrium to speak with the mistress."

"Let her come. I will receive her here."

Presently the stranger entered. At sight of her the Jewess arose, and was about to speak; then she hesitated, changed color, and finally drew back, saying, "I have known you, good woman. You are—"

"I was Iras, the daughter of Balthasar."

Esther conquered her surprise, and bade the servant bring the Egyptian a seat.

"No," said Iras, coldly. "I will retire directly."

The two gazed at each other. We know what Esther presented—a beautiful woman, a happy mother, a contented wife. On the other



side, it was very plain that fortune had not dealt so gently with her former rival. The tall figure remained with some of its grace; but an evil life had tainted the whole person. The face was coarse; the large eyes were red and pursed beneath the lower lids; there was no color in her cheeks. The lips were cynical and hard, and general neglect was leading rapidly to premature old age. Her attire was ill-chosen and draggled. The mud of the road clung to her sandals. Iras broke the painful silence.

"These are thy children?"

Esther looked at them, and smiled.

"Yes. Will you not speak to them?"

"I would scare them," Iras replied. Then she drew closer to Esther, and, seeing her shrink, said, "Be not afraid. Give thy husband a message for me. Tell him his enemy is dead, and that for the much misery he brought me I slew him."

"His enemy!"

"The Messala. Further, tell thy husband that for the harm I sought to do him I have been punished until even he would pity me."

Tears arose in Esther's eyes, and she was about to speak.

"Nay," said Iras, "I do not want pity or tears. Tell him, finally, I have found that to be a Roman is to be a brute. Farewell."

She moved to go. Esther followed her.

"Stay, and see my husband. He has no feeling against you. He sought for you everywhere. He will be your friend. I will be your friend. We are Christians."

The other was firm.

"No; I am what I am of choice. It will be over shortly."

"But"—Esther hesitated—"have we nothing you would wish; nothing to—to—"

The countenance of the Egyptian softened; something like a smile played about her lips. She looked at the children upon the floor.

"There is something," she said.

Esther followed her eyes, and with quick perception answered, "It is yours."

Iras went to them, and knelt on the lion's skin, and kissed them both. Rising slowly, she looked at them; then passed to the door and out of it without a parting word. She walked rapidly, and was gone before Esther could decide what to do.

Ben-Hur, when he was told of the visit, knew certainly what he had long surmised—that on the day of the crucifixion Iras had deserted her father for Messala. Nevertheless, he set out immediately and hunted for her vainly; they never saw her more, or heard of her. The blue bay, with all its laughing under the sun, has yet its dark secrets. Had it a tongue, it might tell us of the Egyptian.

Simonides lived to be a very old man. In the tenth year of Nero's reign, he gave up the business so long centred in the warehouse at Antioch. To the last he kept a clear head and a good heart, and was successful.

One evening, in the year named, he sat in his arm-chair on the terrace of the warehouse.



Ben-Hur and Esther, and their three children, were with him. The last of the ships swung at mooring in the current of the river; all the rest had been sold. In the long interval between this and the day of the crucifixion but one sorrow had befallen them: that was when the mother of Ben-Hur died; and then and now their grief would have been greater but for their Christian faith.

The ship spoken of had arrived only the day before, bringing intelligence of the persecution of Christians begun by Nero in Rome, and the party on the terrace were talking of the news when Malluch, who was still in their service, approached and delivered a package to Ben-Hur.

"Who brings this?" the latter asked, after reading.

"An Arab."

"Where is he?"

"He left immediately."

"Listen," said Ben-Hur to Simonides.

He read then the following letter:

"I, Ilderim, the son of Ilderim the Generous, and sheik of the tribe of Ilderim, to Judah, son of Hur.

"Know, O friend of my father's, how my father loved you. Read what is herewith sent, and you will know. His will is my will; therefore what he gave is thine.

"All the Parthians took from him in the great battle in which they slew him I have retaken—this writing, with other things, and vengeance, and all the brood of that Mira who in his time was mother of so many stars.

"Peace be to you and all yours.

"This voice out of the desert is the voice of

"ILDERIM, Sheik."



Ben-Hur next unrolled a scrap of papyrus yellow as a withered mulberry leaf. It required the daintiest handling. Proceeding, he read :

"Ilderim, surnamed the Generous, sheik of the tribe of Ilderim, to the son who succeeds me.

"All I have, O son, shall be thine in the day of thy succession, except that property by Antioch known as the Orchard of Palms ; and it shall be to the son of Hur who brought us such glory in the Circus—to him and his forever.

"Dishonor not thy father.

"ILDERIM THE GENEROUS, Sheik."

"What say you ?" asked Ben-Hur, of Simonides.

Esther took the papers pleased, and read them to herself. Simonides remained silent. His eyes were upon the ship ; but he was thinking. At length he spoke.

"Son of Hur," he said, gravely, "the Lord has been good to you in these later years. You have much to be thankful for. Is it not time to decide finally the meaning of the gift of the great fortune now all in your hand, and growing ?"

"I decided that long ago. The fortune was meant for the service of the Giver ; not a part, Simonides, but all of it. The question with me has been, How can I make it most useful in his cause ? And of that tell me, I pray you."

Simonides answered,

"The great sums you have given to the Church here in Antioch, I am witness to. Now, instantly almost with this gift of the generous



sheik's, comes the news of the persecution of the brethren in Rome. It is the opening of a new field. The light must not go out in the capital."

"Tell me how I can keep it alive."

"I will tell you. The Romans, even this Nero, hold two things sacred—I know of no others they so hold—they are the ashes of the dead and all places of burial. If you cannot build temples for the worship of the Lord above ground, then build them below the ground; and to keep them from profanation, carry to them the bodies of all who die in the faith."

Ben-Hur arose excitedly.

"It is a great idea," he said. "I will not wait to begin it. Time forbids waiting. The ship that brought the news of the suffering of our brethren shall take me to Rome. I will sail to-morrow."

He turned to Malluch.

"Get the ship ready, Malluch, and be thou ready to go with me."

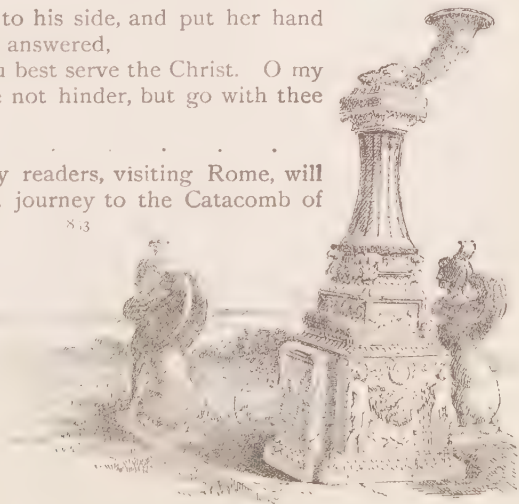
"It is well," said Simonides.

"And thou, Esther, what sayest thou?" asked Ben-Hur.

Esther came to his side, and put her hand on his arm, and answered,

"So wilt thou best serve the Christ. O my husband, let me not hinder, but go with thee and help."

If any of my readers, visiting Rome, will make the short journey to the Catacomb of



San Calixto, which is more ancient than that of San Sebastiano, he will see what became of the fortune of Ben-Hur, and give him thanks. Out of that vast tomb Christianity issued to supersede the Cæsars.



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